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WIDE AWAKE

COMPLETE
STORY

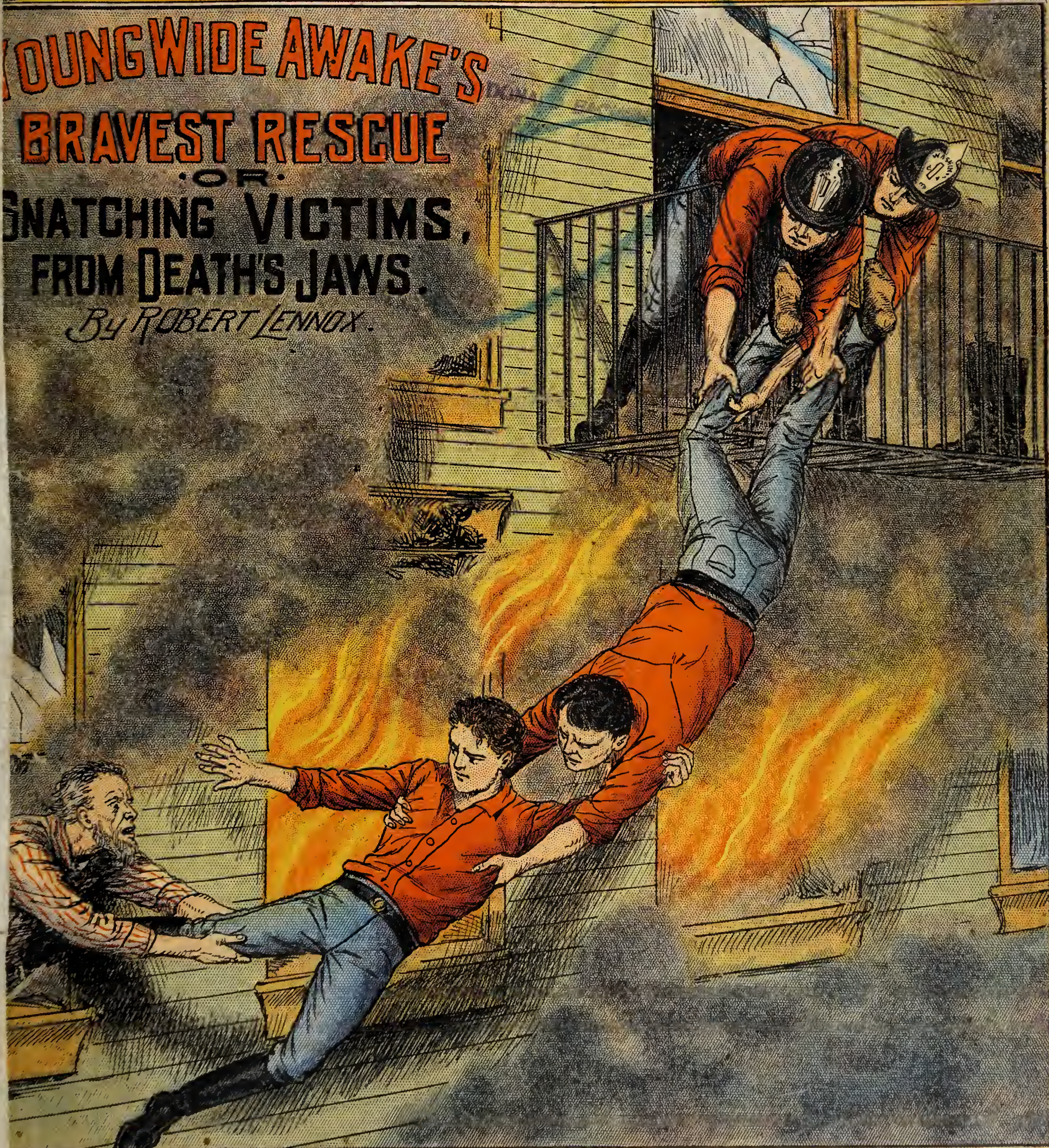
WEEKLY.

EVERY
WEEK.

YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S
BRAVEST RESCUE

OR
SNATCHING VICTIMS
FROM DEATH'S JAWS.

By ROBERT LENNOX.



Catch hold of my leg. We'll get you out of this, or go down together!" cheered Wide, as Hal and Joe swung Terry and himself, pendulum fashion, toward the terrified fire victim. It was a deed of appalling peril, in the jaws of death!

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Quakake Pa.

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WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

A COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK.

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No. 65.

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PRICE 5 CENTS.

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Quaker's Pl.

Young Wide Awake's Bravest Rescue

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SNATCHING VICTIMS FROM DEATH'S JAWS

By ROBERT LENNOX

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN FRED IS GLUM.

Captain Fred Parsons had good reason to remember the fifth of July.

It was on the night of that day that he had faced trial before the City Council on trial for an attack in which he had led his fellows against the crew of Washington No. 1.

Although Captain Fred had gotten off on probation by a margin of one vote, he hated Young Wide Awake worse than ever.

Of course, it was all Wide's fault that Fred Parsons had let his nasty temper get him into such a scrape!

"That fellow always has the slickest, sneaky way of getting out of any scrape," he complained to Lieutenant Larry Downes, as the two sat in the Neptune No. 2 fire-house that warm, bright, July morning.

"Oh, well, Halstead didn't win on you," Larry replied, carelessly. "You had a vote to shave on in the Council, and your dad could have done better if he had had more time."

"But the confounded cheek of those councilmen!" raged Fred. "They had the impudence to put me on probation! Me!"

"Hum!" said Larry, non-committally.

"I suppose they expect me to walk a chalk-line for a while."

"Then they don't know you," laughed Larry. "You won't walk any line for anybody."

"You're jolly well right I won't," growled Fred. "Tell you what I've a good mind to do—resign!"

"Eh?" asked Larry, looking up, with interest.

But Fred was quick to note the gleam in Downes's eyes, and quicker to resent it.

"Oh, you're interested, are you?" snarled Fred. "You want to see me resign, or be kicked out. Either would suit you!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Larry, looking him straight in the eyes.

"You want to see me get out of the captaincy of this fire company. Then you can be captain. That's just what you're after, Larry Downes."

"Oh, am I?" retorted the other, tartly. "I don't know that I've seen you get either so much pleasure or so much honor out of it that I hanker to be captain."

"Yes, you do!" growled Fred, in his ugliest tone. "You've been trimming your lamps for a long time to get the captaincy away from me."

"Stop that kind of talk," warned Larry, quietly but with a scowl on his rather handsome face.

"I won't stop it," snarled Fred. "I repeat it."

Larry rose to his feet.

Something in his manner caused Parsons to rise quickly himself.

The two stood facing each other with anything but friendly looks.

"Fred," said Larry, a little breathlessly, "if you're glum, and have got a grouch on, I don't blame you, for you've been up against it. Halstead has certainly hit you hard, and has rubbed it in in a way that must make him grin in

his sleeve. But if you're turning on me, and accusing me in your sober senses, then—then——"

"Well," uttered Fred, tauntingly, "say it."

"You lie!"

Captain Fred whipped off his coat in a flash.

Larry Downes did the same.

"Here, stop that," said a rather pleasant, half-laughing voice, as Bob Fullerton, the hoodoo joker stepped in through the open street door and eyed the pair.

Seeing their fists clenched, Bob walked in between the pair.

"Get back to your kennels, both of you," commanded Bob, coolly.

"If you stand there, Bob, you're likely to get pounded on both sides," warned Larry.

"See here, you chumps, both of you," retorted Bob, "you back off in two opposite directions."

"Out of the way, Fullerton!" raged Fred.

"Out of the way nothing!" retorted Bob. "I'm the self-appointed arbitration committee. We won't have any fighting until we see whether arbitration will do the trick just as well."

"It won't in this case," glowered Captain Fred. "Downes called me a liar."

"Well, you are, aren't you?" demanded Bob, turning his head and looking into Fred's eyes with a smile that well-nigh disarmed anger. "I have known lots of times, Fred, when you shied like a skittish horse at anything that sounded like the truth. Is that all you two are going to fight about?"

"It's enough," growled Parsons.

"Oh, well, if you two are going to fight about that," responded Fullerton, drawing off his coat and tossing it across the floor, "I'm going to stand at the side of Larry and help him to prove his statement."

Larry began to laugh at the humorous side of this proposition, and stepped back a few feet.

"Now, see here, Fred," urged Bob, "Larry didn't call you a liar unless you stung him into it. Of course, you can have a fight, if you want. You're both husky fellows, and fairly well matched. You can hammer each other pretty hard. But who will win?"

"I will," declared Fred, stiffly.

"Humph!" jeered Larry. "I'll be the winner."

"You're both wrong," drawled Bob. "Washington No. 1 would win, and have the laugh on Neptune, because the captain and lieutenant hated each other so that they couldn't keep their hands off of each other. It would be meat for the Washingtons to know that you two had pounded each other up. Then, as for you, Fred, you've just made a rather good impression on that swell girl, Anita Duroc, though, honestly, we can't imagine what the girl's about to fancy you. Now, if you get an eye blacked, your nose swollen to four sizes and your lip puffed way out by Larry's fists, do you think a dainty, handsome, swell girl like Miss Duroc will want to be seen in public with you?"

Fred gave a gasp at that, and his fists unclenched.

He had but recently made Anita's acquaintance.

He had gotten on fairly well with her, and wanted to continue to do so.

Larry stepped over and took a seat across the room.

"That's wise," Bob commented. "Now, then, Fred, as

soon as you can get a little cooler just under your collar you go over and shake hands with Larry. We may have enemies outside the company, but, for heaven's sake, let us have peace within our own crowd."

Larry rose, holding out his hand.

Captain Fred scowled, then crossed the room to take the hand.

"Hooray for me!" chuckled Bob. "Now you two fellows are behaving more like human beings in the same show. Now we can——"

Toot! toot! sounded an automobile horn outside, and then a jaunty French touring car glided up to the curb before the door.

"Is Captain Parsons in there?" called a sweet, clear, girlish voice.

It was Anita Duroc, dark, handsome, tall and seventeen, daughter of a retired broker who had recently settled over on the road near Waverly, who sat at the speed lever in that touring car.

"Why, good morning—delighted!" cried Fred, starting forward.

Then remembering that he was in his shirt-sleeves, he flushed, came back, made a dive for his coat and caught up his straw hat, which he held in his hand as he hurried out to take the slim, cool hand of Anita in his other hand.

Larry and Bob promptly faded. That is, they drew back out of sight that they might not appear to be in the way.

"I thought I'd stop and make sure that you're still alive," smiled Anita.

"Won't you come in?"

"No; a fire-house is no place for a young lady. It's her place to keep out."

"Well, I'm royally glad to see you!" cried Fred, his face glowing, as he still held her hand. "A fellow would lose his taste for other pictures after seeing you as you look this morning."

"A very pretty compliment, sir," laughed Anita, releasing her hand.

She did, indeed, look a picture, for her costume, simple though it looked, was of the Parisian kind of perfection.

That was one thing that Fred liked especially about the girl.

She was always dressed in exquisite style.

"I always feel a bit lonely when I drive the car over here through Belmont," Anita went on, lowering her voice a little.

"Oh, you'll soon be acquainted everywhere around here—with every one you want to know," Fred assured her, confidently.

"I hope so. It's awkward to be a newcomer anywhere. I'm giving a little tea the day after to-morrow."

"I shall remember that, and be delighted to come over," Fred spoke, promptly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but this isn't that kind," Anita answered, hesitatingly.

"Not what kind?" persisted Fred.

"Oh, I mean I'm inviting only girls."

"Waverly girls?"

"Yes; and some Belmont girls. I've sent cards to Miss Kitty Lester, Miss Faith Vane, Miss Dot Preston and a few other young ladies in Belmont."

"You have?" cried Fred, reproachfully. "The next thing, you'll be inviting the fellows of Washington No. 1."

"Well, why not?" asked Anita, opening her eyes rather wider than usual. "I've been told that they're a very nice set of young men."

"Humph! They're the sons of mechanics, and that kind of truck," retorted Fred.

"And you, an American, throw reproach at them for that?" asked Anita, looking surprised.

"Well, they don't belong to our crowd, you know."

"What has that to do with their being nice young fellows?" asked Anita, so quietly that Fred saw on what dangerous ground he was treading.

"Well, of course, you know," said Fred, "there's deep enmity between the Washingtons and us."

"Does that enmity extend to the young ladies who are interested in the Washingtons?" inquired Miss Duroc, a trifle stiffly.

"Oh—er—er—of course not," Fred made haste to say, though stammeringly. "But the Kit Lester crowd, you know, have nothing in common with our set."

"You speak rather disrespectfully of Miss Lester," said Anita, in some surprise.

"Oh, I didn't mean to, of course," Fred answered, carelessly, though his tone left much to be inferred. "Only we don't have anything to do with the Washingtons, except at fires, when we can't help it. And we don't meet Miss Lester and her friends."

"I'm glad, then, my tea is only for girls," Anita went on. "It would be awkward to have two sets of people there who don't like each other."

"Then you still intend to have Miss Lester and her friends?" asked Fred, anxiously.

"Oh, I've got to, now I've sent them cards, you see," Anita nodded, confidentially. "I couldn't possibly send word by the mail following to the effect that it was all a mistake, and ask them not to come."

"All right, sighed Fred, nor did Miss Duroc take pains to ask him just what he meant by that.

"It's too bad, though," Anita admitted, musingly. "I really ought to have asked you more about the people who live around here. I want to know only people who are really nice. That is why I invited Miss Lester and her friends. I understood that Miss Kitty Lester was the loveliest girl around here, and of one of the best families, as well as of a charming personality."

"I didn't say she wasn't, you know," Fred urged.

"But you said your set didn't associate with her."

"I didn't say quite that, either, Anita, if you will remember. I only declined to express an opinion."

"That may be worse than offering an opinion," Anita went on.

"No; the most I said was that the Miss Lester crowd associate too much with our enemies, the Washingtons."

"I'm awfully sorry," Anita admitted, with a sigh. "However, my curiosity is up now, and I'm going to find out just why you young gentlemen don't meet or feel willing to know Miss Lester and her friends."

"Oh, don't attempt to do that, please!" begged Fred, in secret alarm.

"Yes, I shall," decided Anita, firmly. "I expect to live in this part of the country hereafter, and I must know all

about the young people that I may be called upon to admit. But the next time, Fred, I shall remember to consult you about the best people to invite."

"I shall be tremendously glad to advise you, Anita," Fred murmured, eagerly.

"Who are some of the girls that you Neptunes like?" asked Anita, suddenly.

That was a poser that staggered Fred.

"Er—er—the only one I can think of at this moment is Miss Anita Duroc," stammered Fred. "She blinds me to the remembrance of the rest."

"Thank you again," smiled Anita, though seriously. "I must be going now, Fred. You've given me something to think about. I am going to find out all about Miss Lester and her associates."

"Please don't bother about it."

"Yes, I shall."

There was a smile on Fred's face until Anita had run her car away down the street.

Then his face looked very glum and solemn as he stepped back into the fire-house.

"Now, you've done it!" muttered Bob Fullerton, consolingly. "Miss Duroc will make determined inquiries, and she'll find out just why we don't like the Lester set—because Kit and her friends won't have anything to do with us."

"Well, I couldn't tell her that, could I?" snarled Fred.

"You don't need to. She'll find out for herself," pursued Bob. "Let me tell you something about Miss Duroc, Fred. She isn't altogether a fellow's girl. She's a good deal of a girl's girl, and she wants to know the nice girls. When she finds that she can't know Kit Lester's set and receive your attentions, too, then she'll drop you like a ton of old and worthless brick."

"Oh, dry up!" growled Fred.

"All right. Wait and see for yourself. You could have handled the matter much better than you did."

"How?" glared Fred.

"Why, you could have said a lot in praise of Kit Lester and her friends, but you could have expressed regret that their friendliness for our enemies, the Washingtons, kept us from cultivating the acquaintance of the Lester set. Then Miss Duroc would have received the Lester set just once, would have been nice to them, and then would have shied away from them after that. But now Miss Duroc will go to investigating in her own way, and she'll find out just how little use the Kit Lester crowd have for us. Then, do you think Anita Duroc will care to be tagged after you? Nit!"

"What do you say, Larry?" asked Fred.

"I'm afraid you've put your foot in it, Fred," Lieutenant Downes replied.

A stray cat crossing the back of the fire-house, Captain Fred snatched up an iron washer and threw it viciously at the poor tramp animal.

He missed, and the cat scooted.

CHAPTER II.

A FLURRY AT THE WASHINGTON HOUSE.

"'Tis dull, the day," grumbled Terry Rourke, as he sat astraddle the inclined pole of Washington No. 1, just inside the doorway.

"Don't grumble too soon, my lad," warned Young Wide Awake. "Whenever we think things are going all to the sleepy, something happens that gives us a two-hours' job fire-fighting."

"Oi'm not sure the excitement 'd be bad," muttered Terry, who had one of the discontented streaks that he sometimes got from too much enforced idleness.

"I don't mind taking things easy," murmured Wide. "We always get them hard enough in the end to make up for any little breathing spells."

"Oh, Oi'm not wantin' a fire," returned Rourke. "'Tis far from that. But nothing at all is happening. Me feet are going to sleep for want av use."

"We had excitement enough last week to last us for three weeks," Wide laughed. "That was the greatest Fourth of July week I ever knew."

"'Twas some lively for thim Nepehunes, too," grinned Terry. "Oi'll warrant they're not sighing, the day, for more excitement."

"They'll be framing up something to get square," hinted Wide.

"Thin Oi hope 'twill be Bob Fullerton, the hoodoo joker, tho't'll be on the job," smirked Terry. "Oi always feel safe whin he's got his wits at wurruk to do something real divilish to us."

These two were the only ones of Washington's crew at the engine house this forenoon.

At the start of the school vacation the fellows had been prone to gather there in bunches.

But now they were afield in search of other forms of sport or entertainment.

"Shall we be going up to Main Street?" demanded Terry, as Wide walked toward the open door.

"We will not," said Wide, as he took a glance up the street. "This old fire-house will soon be the most comfortable spot on earth."

"What ar-re yez talking about?" demanded Rourke, gruffly.

"Come here and see."

"Och! The fairies are sure good to us, the day," murmured Terry, for he looked up the street to behold Kitty and Faith, two visions of summerish loveliness, coming down the street.

Talking earnestly, the girls had not yet caught sight of their young firemen sweethearts, but they soon did glance down the street.

Then they quickened their pace somewhat, as Wide and Terry also strolled forward to meet them.

"We've been mighty dull. Can't you spend the forenoon with us?" invited Wide, as he raised his hat.

"What? In that greasy old engine-house?" asked Kitty, as though she were shocked.

"That's a wicked reflection on the tidiness with which we keep house and machines," uttered Wide, reproachfully.

"And av ye don't love the shmell of oil as ye should," proposed Terry, mischievously, "we'll bring out chairs. The sidewalk is in the shade. We can sit there in the coolest part av the town and talk the hours away."

"And have the neighbors look over from behind closed shutters and talk about how certain louny ladies run after young firemen?" pouted Faith.

"Well, ye do, don't yez?" demanded Rourke, blandly.

"Terry Rourke!"

Faith came to an indignant halt, staring in real or pretended displeasure at her sweetheart.

"Why d'yez mind the name av it, whin ye have the pleasure of it?" Terry went on, innocently.

"Kitty," said Faith, almost icily, "don't you think we've spent too much time already on Holmes Street?"

"Nowhere near enough time," retorted Kitty, serenely. "You should spend more time here, Faith. In other words, you should take the time to train the young man properly."

But Terry, not at all abashed, had stepped to Faith's side while Kitty strolled on with Wide.

"We've come for only a moment, just to say how-d-ye-do," explained Miss Lester. "We came downtown on a few little errands. Hullo! is the engine-house deserted? We feared there'd be a lot of the fellows here."

"No; we have the place quite to ourselves, at present," Wide answered.

Terry promptly vanished, to reappear with two chairs, which he placed for the girls on the sidewalk.

Faith, despite her seeming indignation, quickly dropped into one of the chairs, while Terry, standing beside her, plied a palm-leaf fan so that the breeze swept over her face.

"If you girls can think of anything by way of excitement," smiled our hero, "you'll place Terry under obligations to his dying day."

"What could we do?" wondered Kitty.

"We might elope," suggested Faith, archly.

"A-a-h, wait till Oi get through another year av schooling," begged Terry, "and Oi cud keep a home going the betther."

"Oh, we wouldn't elope with you," declared Faith, severely.

"Wid who, thin?" flared Terry, jealously.

Faith tossed her head.

"Oh, it isn't an elopment when you tell beforehand with whom you're going to elope," she declared.

"It wud be a funeral, afther, for the feller, annyway," predicted Terry.

"Stop those children, or they'll be fighting next," smiled Kitty, looking up into Wide's face.

"Terry's just spoiling for a fight, anyway," laughed Wide. "But I never knew him to choose a girl for his antagonist before."

"I don't like fighting people, anyway," declared Faith. "I'd never elope with one, anyway."

"Thin ye'll show poor judgment, me gurrul," broke in Terry. "For the feller ye elope wid is sure to have a dozen fellers to fight wid on his return. There'll be at least thot many disappointed wans afther him."

"Now you're becoming more bearable," laughed Faith, glancing up at Rourke.

"Oh, yes!" grimaced Terry. "Tell a gurrul how aisy she break hear-rts, and she picks yez at wanst for a wise man. But tell her yure own hear-rt is the only wan tho't'd suffer, and she looks bored."

Faith pouted, while Mistress Kitty laughed.

Then suddenly she looked up at the young fire captain again.

"Oh, by the way, Dick, that Anita Duroc, from Waverly,

has sent us cards to a tea the day after to-morrow. Just a girls' tea, you know."

"Then you'll have a chance to make her acquaintance," suggested Young Wide Awake.

"I suppose that's what she intends it for," Kitty nodded.

"But we can't go."

"Can't?"

"At least," corrected Kitty, "we're going to mail our regrets."

Wide made no reply to this.

He was wondering whether Fred Parsons would be glad, or whether he would regard it as an insult to Miss Duroc.

Just at that moment Anita Duroc, running her car slowly, appeared at the head of the street.

Catching sight of the young people, Anita stopped her car, backed it, then swung down into Holmes Street.

"Speaking of angels," smiled Wide.

"Why, it's Miss Duroc coming now, isn't it?" cried Kitty.

Anita ran her car slowly down the street, turning in toward the curb.

As she stopped, nodding, Wide and Terry lifted their hats.

Kitty and Faith rose.

"Oh, Miss Lester, and Miss Vaine, I am glad to see you both," Anita began. "Did you receive cards from me?"

"Yes, thank you," Kitty acknowledged.

Wide and Terry took a step or two back into the fire-house, though not out of sight.

"Then I hope I may look for you both," went on Miss Duroc.

"I am sorry to say that we had decided it would be necessary to mail our regrets," Kitty responded.

"Oh, then I shall be so disappointed!" cried Anita Duroc.

She spoke in the usual society tone, but Wide thought to himself:

"She really is more disappointed than she would want any one to see, but she is trying to hide her annoyance like a thoroughbred."

"But you will come over and see me at some other time?" Anita suggested.

"We shall hope to be able to," Kitty nodded.

"So sorry you can't come the day after to-morrow. Well, good-by."

"Good-by," answered both girls.

"Was that a snub? A turn-down?" wondered Wide.

He said nothing, as Kitty turned to him, for he regarded the whole thing as a girl's affair.

"Perhaps she is secretly relieved to know that we are not coming," laughed Kitty.

"Perhaps," assented Wide.

"You see," explained Mistress Kitty, "it would be all right for us to go. But Miss Duroc is plainly intending to become acquainted in this neighborhood. Before long she would send out invitations to something to which both the girls and the young men would be invited, and then I am afraid the two fire companies would become mixed up.

There's friction enough now, without inviting more trouble."

"If she really is disappointed, then I'm sorry to dis-

appoint her," sighed Faith, "for Miss Duroc seems like a really very nice girl."

But still Wide said nothing.

Terry was about to say something, but, looking at our hero, changed his mind and did not speak.

The girls resumed their chairs for a little while, and chatted, after which Kitty rose and declared that they must go to attend to their errands.

"May we go with you?" asked Wide.

"It would be awfully nice to have you," Kitty admitted, "but as we're going to the dressmaker's to try on things——"

"Oh, pardon me! I thought it was to be a shopping trip."

"Or buying thripe and onions at the butchers," supplied Terry, mischievously.

Faith, who was a very fastidious girl, turned her nose up slightly.

"You go inside, young man; before you get into a quarrel," ordered Wide, with mock sternness.

"The Mohammedans have a belief that it's wrong to visit anger upon the weak-minded. A fine thought that, don't you think?" inquired Faith, pleasantly.

"Av course Oi wudn't quarrel wid her," retorted Terry, indignantly.

Faith, who felt that this turned the laugh on her, didn't quite know what to say in the next moment, but she reddened.

"Don't mind him," urged Wide, acting as peacemaker. "Sunstroke runs in Terry's family."

"Sunstroke is a charitable name for it," said Faith, severely.

"Bedad, that reminds me," said Terry.

"Reminds you of what?" Faith retorted.

"Oi haven't been practicing this mor-rning."

"Practicing what?"

"Didn't yez hear av the new curiosity we've had put up in this fire-house?"

"No," Faith admitted.

"'Tis a piece of the real blarney stone that we had brought over from Oireland. We've had it mounted in there. Ivery mor-rning I do me devotions before it, but this mor-rning Oi forgot. Come along, young ladies, and be having a look at it."

Terry was so serious that Faith followed at once, as Rourke led the way in.

Kitty would have gone inside, too, but Wide touched her lightly on the arm.

Smiling into her fireman sweetheart's eyes, Kitty drew back.

"Shure, we thought it best to put it up high, that the tallest av us might be able to look up to the bit av blarney stone," explained Terry, as he and Faith halted, side by side.

"Where is it?" demanded Miss Vane.

"Up there," replied Terry, pointing to where the wall and the ceiling met.

Faith looked hard, but unsuccessfully.

"I don't see it," she observed, bending her head well back.

"'Tis because ye're not looking at jest the r-right spot," quoth Terry, again pointing.

"It must be very small, then," complained Faith.

She was looking so intently that she was wholly off her guard.

Swift as lightning, Terry slipped an arm around her waist, caught one of her hands with his disengaged hand, and pressed a kiss against her lips.

Faith struggled to get away, you may be sure, but Terry imprinted another kiss ere he darted back.

Quick as he was, however, Faith landed a brisk little slap across his face.

"Ivery wan to his own bent," laughed Terry. "Shure we must both feel betther now."

Faith laughed, too, at the ridiculous nature of the imposition practiced upon her, though she blushed as Kitty, peering laughingly in, queried:

"Did you see it, Faith?"

"Shall I show it to yez, Miss Kitty?" queried Terry.

"If you try to," warned Wide, "you'll think something heavier than the real blarney stone has dropped on your head."

"Thin, on sicond thought," said Rourke, soberly, "Oi'll rest on me honors."

"Come, let us be going, Kitty, dear," urged Faith, rather briskly. "We've lost a lot of time here."

"I wondher was Faith really provoked wid me?" wondered Terry, aloud, just after the two girls had gone.

But the girls laughed as they went up the street, so it didn't look as though any really bad feeling had been caused by Terry's pleasantry.

"A gr-reat pair av gurruls," nodded Terry after them. "What would we do widout thim?"

"I don't like to think," muttered Young Wide Awake.

They seated themselves in the chairs left vacant by their late visitors.

Ten minutes, perhaps, had passed, when both looked up at the sound of rapidly running feet coming down Holmes Street.

"This fellow is sure in a hurry," commented Wide, eyeing a man of about twenty-five, and some five feet six in height, rather shabbily dressed, who was running toward them.

"Oi wondher av he wants the fire depar-rtment?" suggested Terry.

As the runner came near them he ran to the outer edge of the sidewalk to pass them.

"No, he didn't want us," muttered Wide. "Hullo! Gracious!"

For around the corner, above them, shot Ted Lester, evidently in hot pursuit of the other runner.

"Stop 'em, fellows!" yelled Ted.

But Wide hadn't waited for the word.

As soon as he realized that young Lester was hot-footing after the stranger, the young fire captain sprang out of his chair, darting in pursuit.

Terry was only a few yards to the rear.

Wholly fresh as to wind, and used to swift running, Wide rapidly overtook the fugitive.

"Keep away from me," yelled the latter, over his shoulder, "or you'll wish you had!"

Wide's only answer was to make a harder spurt forward.

Then, like a flash, the fugitive wheeled, facing squarely about.

As our hero raced up, the stranger's right hand came into view, a sharp piece of steel glistening there.

Wide saw it too late to draw back.

Just as he got within reach, the fugitive struck with the knife—struck viciously, with all his strength, backed by his weight.

Had that knife-point touched our hero it would have been an ugly matter.

But Wide, trained in a hundred rough-and-tumbles, side-stepped as though by instinct.

As the fugitive lurched forward, caught off his balance by the force of his own vimful stroke at nothingness, Young Wide Awake delivered a hook, landing his hard right fist between the fellow's eyes.

Then Terry caught up, leaping forward, bending low, and snatching away the fugitive's knife.

Ted was the next to catch up.

With so many enemies at hand, the stranger was not trying to put up any fight.

He did not even resist when Ted felt rapidly over his pockets on the outside, then drew a monogrammed purse from one of the pockets.

"He snatched Kit's wad-case and piked with it," explained Ted, slangily. "A good thing I was right handy."

"Sneak thief, eh?" demanded Wide.

"That's it."

"Then tell your cousin, Ted, that we've got the fellow, and that he's on his way to the lockup."

"Do you want to carry the purse to her yourself?" queried Ted, still halting.

"No; for we were assured that our company was wanted this morning," smiled the young fire captain, drily.

"But tell Miss Faith," begged Terry, "that the blarney stone is on exhibition daily, from nine to five."

"Tell her what?" cried Ted.

"Tell her jist what Oi said. She'll undherstand, or 'tis not me fault."

Ted, mindful of the fact that Kitty would be needing her purse, started back on the run.

"As for you now," Wide said, addressing the fellow he had knocked down, "on your pins for you."

He took hold of the fugitive, helping him to his feet.

"We won't bother to take him around to the station-house, Terry," Wide proposed. "Run ahead to the fire-house and telephone for an officer."

He gripped the sneak-thief by the arm, urging him along the street.

For the first few yards the prisoner went willingly enough.

Then Terry Rourke, happening to glance back, shouted hoarsely:

"Look out, Wide—for the love of heaven!"

The prisoner had stealthily drawn a pocket-knife with his left hand.

He was in the act of sneaking a blow on Wide's nearer side just as Rourke's warning rang out.

Warned, Wide saw the movement in time to jump back.

As he did so, he let go.

The stranger's quick foot tripped him.

Wide went to the earth, though untouched by the knife.

Gr-r-r! Trot, all his short hair a-bristle, had seen this happen from the fire-house door.

As Wide slipped and pitched, and the fugitive took to his heels, Trot came flying down the street.

Through the first open gate rushed the stranger, as his threat came back over his shoulder:

"You shall hear from me later!"

"Catch him, Throt!" raged Terry, himself dashing past just before Wide could spring to his feet.

Through the yard after the fugitive raced Trot, but brought up at a board fence, over which his intended victim shinned, nimbly.

Then Terry reached the fence, a few seconds later, with Wide close on the trail.

Both the young firemen climbed over the fence as fast as they could go.

But a chase over a fence, and through yards, is a hard proposition, once the fugitive has been lost sight of.

Though Terry and Wide searched for some minutes, they did so with a growing conviction that the stranger had been knowing enough to make good his escape.

Then they gave it up and returned to the fire-house.

CHAPTER III.

TROT DISCOVERS A FIRE.

"Ugh!" shivered Wide. "If there's one thing I don't like to face, it's cold steel! I'd sooner face bullets or bombs, any day."

"But 'tis a foine pleasure to be pounding a feller thot's been thrying t' use steel on yez," uttered Terry, grimly.

"Where did that fellow come from, do you suppose? It seems to me we must know all of the few Belmont crooks."

"From Norwich, thin, maybe," hazarded Rourke. "There's a small village of bad folks in the town across the river."

"Well, you've had a little break in the morning that was growing so dull for you, Terry," smiled Wide.

Down the street, strolling slowly, as though the heat made him drowsy, came Phil Scott.

He stepped inside, brought out another chair, tilted it against the building in the shade and began fanning himself with his hat.

"What do you fellows do to kill time?" queried Phil, languidly.

"Well, Rourke has turned guide," Wide responded.

"Guide?"

"That is, he's been showing a small bit of the real blarney stone to visitors."

"A piece of the real?" asked Phil, opening his eyes. "I wish you'd show it to me."

"Show it to the like av you?" cried Terry, then exploded with laughter.

"Terry shows it only to girls," explained Wide.

"I shouldn't think that would be very dignified," objected Phil.

"And why not?" demanded Terry.

"Why, I've read that when you go to see the real blarney stone, in Ireland, you have to be lowered down for a look at the famous old stone."

"The different the way Oi do it here," retorted Rourke. "Ye have to stand and look up at it."

"And only a girl can see it, and she must be shorter than her guide," Wide explained.

"Say, I think I'm wise," broke in Phil. "Whee! I think I'll rig up one on our front porch."

Then, changing the subject, they told Phil about the brief adventure with the sneak-thief.

"Howly smoke! What ails Trot?" ejaculated Terry.

Washington's four-legged mascot was racing down from Main Street, his tongue hanging out.

Reaching our hero, the dog began to jump up and down, whining, then heading to Main Street.

"Do you want to lead us to something, Trot, good old dog?" demanded Wide, making a move as if to start for Main Street.

Trot jumped up and down some more. Then, finding that our hero did not really follow, he began to whine and yelp.

"Yes, sir; he wants to take us somewhere, fellows," guessed the young fire captain. "Put these chairs inside, and we'll humor the dog."

As quickly as they had placed the chairs in the fire-house they walked after Trot.

But still the coach dog did not appear satisfied.

He yelped, as if urging them on to greater speed.

"You win, then, old fellow," encouraged our hero, breaking into a jogging gait. "Lead the way, sir."

Once he had the trio following him at this increased speed, the coach dog really did appear satisfied.

He raced ahead at leaps and bounds, only turning once in awhile to make sure that they were still following him.

Trot led them straight to the stair entrance to the Eagle office building.

Then up the three flights of stairs he took them, to the top floor.

Here, though there were several offices, most if not all of the regular occupants were away on vacation trips.

From under a door at the further end of the corridor smoke was curling out at a goodly rate.

"By thunder! The good old dog is a real fireman!" uttered Wide, bending down to pat the animal. "Phil, run to the foot of the stairs and turn in the alarm for us, will you?"

As Scott went bounding down, Terry demanded:

"Shall we force the door, Wide?"

"Not unless the fire seems to be gaining fast. We may as well wait for the door-jack."

Outside, they could hear the box number ringing over the fire alarm service of the city.

Not more than three or four minutes elapsed when they heard Lieutenant Hal's voice shouting, on the stairway:

"Rush the hose up. Axe-squad, too. And bring the door-jack!"

Then the young firemen of Washington No. 1 appeared, with a rush.

From one of the foremost Young Wide Awake took the door-jack, putting it in place against the door.

In another moment that barrier was down, and the young firemen rushed in.

The curtains over the windows were drawn, an almost sure sign that the tenant was away out of town.

A flat-top desk at one side of the room was afire, but the

blaze had plainly started in a waste-basketful of papers under the desk.

It had already traveled to the wall, while the carpet also was burning.

Without waiting for orders, Hal directed the hose where it would do the most good.

Wide, having caught an axe from one of his crew, was trying the part of the blazing wall where the fire was briskest.

"It has eaten into the wall, fellows," sang out the young fire captain. "You'll have to rip away this wall lively. Close in, now, and bring it down!"

As often happens, the first water dashed on a well-started blaze only seems to add fuel to the fire.

For some minutes the blaze threatened to get away beyond their control.

"Neptune No. 2 is down in the street," reported Ted Lester. "Shall I summon 'em up here?"

"Is their hose connected?" asked Wide.

"Yes; they're already to play a stream."

"Then wait just a little more until I see whether we can get this out unaided."

It was furiously hot in here, yet Wide hesitated to throw open the windows for fear of adding more air to fan the blaze.

It was a hard, stubborn, up-hill fight, yet by degrees the young firemen conquered, and that without calling in help from the rival fire company.

Not that Wide would have hesitated to call on the Neptunes.

At a fire, Washington's young captain was all fireman.

He knew no rivalries in a fire fight, and would gladly have called the Neptunes had he needed them.

But at length the fire sputtered down, and the Washingtons knew they had it under control.

Captain Parsons and Lieutenant Downes came down the hallway, looking in.

"Nothing but a bonfire, eh?" almost sneered Captain Fred.

"Not much of a fire. We've got it about done for," Wide answered, carelessly.

Five minutes later our hero considered the fire absolutely out.

He ordered the hose withdrawn. The axemen had already left for the street.

As Wide and Terry, the last to leave the room, stepped out into the corridor after the departing hosemen, our hero noticed Trot's conduct.

The dog was standing with his nose close to a closet door, all his hairs bristling.

"Hold on, Terry," spoke Wide, promptly. "There's something wrong behind that door. It's the fuel closet, probably, for this floor. We'd better have a look, for Trot's no fool."

As Terry still carried the door-jack, he handed it to the young captain.

As the door creaked on its hinges some one inside thrust it open.

Bang! A pistol was discharged close to Wide's head, the bullet singeing his hair and burying itself in a wall.

As our hero started back, their fugitive of the street dashed out, aiming the still smoking weapon at Terry.

As Rourke threw himself flat, the stranger darted forward, holding his pistol before him, prepared to run amuck among the startled hosemen.

CHAPTER IV.

BOB HITS IT RIGHT AT LAST!

Bang! bang!

Hosemen scattered right and left as that pistol, spitting flame and bullets, was carried swiftly past them.

All of the shots were aimed high, but no one cared to invite a good aim by reaching out a hand or foot to stop the fugitive.

Crack! crack! crack!

The last shots were fired at the ceiling as the stranger dashed on past the last of the hosemen.

Wide, Terry and Hal had closed in behind, trying to overtake and leap upon the fellow before he suspected a rear attack.

"Let him come!" spoke a cool voice from the head of the stairway. "He's mine!"

Little Chief of Police Sharp stood there, a revolver in his hand.

"Drop that weapon! Throw up your hands like a flash!" rang the hard, metallic voice of the police chief.

All in an instant the fugitive obeyed, for there was that in the police chief's eye and manner which did not invite disobedience.

Then Wide and Hal grabbed the fellow from behind.

Slipping his weapon back in his pocket, Chief Sharp produced handcuffs instead, and soon had them securely snapped on the prisoner's wrists.

"Now, then," asked Mr. Sharp, crisply, "what's this fellow been doing?"

"I reckon he must have set that fire in there," retorted Wide, purposely suppressing any mention of the attack on Miss Kitty's purse, as he knew his sweetheart would not enjoy having to appear in court as a witness.

"Did you?" demanded the chief, shaking his prisoner by one arm.

"I ain't saying a word," growled the other.

"I had a little trouble in the street with him," Wide went on. Trot had a hand in it, too. So Trot knew this fellow. Now, as near as I can figure it out, Trot espied this fellow on Main Street, and sneaked up here after him."

"The blamed dog!" snarled the prisoner, glaring at Trot, who now appeared perfectly satisfied.

"Probably you'll find a kit of burglar's keys, or lock-picks, in this fellow's pockets," our hero continued. "He probably broke into that office to see if there was anything handy that he could steal. Either by intention or accident, he must have dropped something lighted, like a cigarette or a cigar, into the waste-paper basket. Trot, as soon as he smelled fire, must have come back to us on the jump, for the dog was greatly excited when he reached the engine-house. We came up here before this fellow had finished his job of robbery. He heard us coming up the stairs, so, as he couldn't get away, he pulled the office door locked, and hid himself in the wood closet, locking the door on the inside. At least, that's the way I guess at it. Trot, being a fire dog, paid no more heed to this man until the fire was

out. Then he scented him on the other side of the wood-closet door, and drew our attention to the fellow. That's about all guesswork, chief, but I guess I've hit pretty close to the truth."

"Did you set that fire in there on purpose?" glared Chief Sharp giving his prisoner another hard shake.

"Nope."

"It was an accident, then?"

"Y-yes. I—I—hold on! I ain't going to say nothing."

"You don't need to, now, I guess," laughed Mr. Sharp. "You've said enough to show that you were the cause of the fire, and that you broke into that office. I guess you'll be ready to tell the rest when you've been locked up a few hours, down at my hotel."

Chief Sharp now descended with his prisoner, followed by Wide and Terry, with the hose crew.

There had been wild excitement in the street when the shots were heard, and now the crowd gaped curiously at the nerry little chief and his handcuffed man.

But Sharp pushed a way through the crowd, answering no questions.

Wide was therefore besieged for news.

All he told was that the fellow, a burglar, who had set the fire, had been caught while trying to escape.

But that much, reaching the ears of Parsons and the Neptune crew, was enough to set them wild with envy.

Washington No. 1 had again carried away sensational honors, while the Neptunes had been fanning themselves down in the street.

Two hours afterwards Chief Sharp had the whole of the story out of his prisoner.

He was a Norwich man named Abe Dewing, a fellow who had been a petty thief for years.

Abe Dewing had gotten to reading in the newspapers of clever thieves in the greater cities, who committed much more daring crimes.

Dewing had longed to be one of these master hands in the bigger criminal world.

Yet, first of all, Dewing figured that he must have money before he could venture into a great town like New York or Chicago.

His stealings in Norwich having been small of late, he had crossed over into Belmont to try his luck.

His first try had been for Mistress Kitty's pocketbook.

Having all but gotten away with that, but having failed, as soon as he got away from Wide and Terry he prowled about Main Street.

On the upper floor of the Eagle Building, finding all the offices closed, he thought there might be a chance.

He picked the lock of the door in which the fire was found, then rummaged the desk and other parts of the room.

While so engaged, Dewing tossed a cigarette thoughtlessly into the waste-basket, just before going out.

As Dewing went to another office door, he thought he saw a dog moving in the darkened corridor, but paid no attention.

He entered a second office, by means of his burglar tools.

Finding nothing there, he had just closed the door when he heard Wide, Terry, Phil and the dog racing up the stairs.

Having already left the wood-closet door open, as a pos-

sible place to retreat to, Dewing slipped in there, fastening the door on the inside and waiting for the young firemen to leave.

But now all of Dewing's plans were nipped in the bud.

He was locked up, awaiting trial on most ordinary charges of arson and daylight burglary, and all thanks to a nondescript fire department dog.

It was thanks to Trot, too, that Dewing, later on, found his right place in prison.

Over in the Neptune house the machines had been put back in their places, and most of Parsons's crew had scattered again.

But Fred and Larry Downes were in a corner, talking with themselves, while Bob Fullerton was having a little chat with Brick Houston by the door.

"Confound those fellows," grumbled Fred. "They even got glory out of a little waste-basket fire. All we get out of anything is the pleasure of being the goat!"

"I've just been thinking of a bully little scheme to make the other fellows the goats for once," began Bob Fullerton.

"Grab that fellow and throw him out, head-first," growled Fred Parsons.

"Huh! You needn't be so touchy before you know a blessed thing about it," retorted Bob, with an injured look on his round, pink-and-white face.

"We've all but gone to jail, and have come within an ace of being lynched, all through backing up your bully schemes," snapped Larry. "So shut up, Bob."

"Well, I won't tell you a word about it, then," rejoined Bob, looking more hurt than ever.

"If youse don't," spoke up Brick Houston, grinning, "I will. It's too blamed good to keep."

"Oh, is it?" asked Fred, curiously, though none the less suspiciously, for he had been bitten badly before.

"Well, anyway, it can't get none o' the rest o' youse into trouble," declared Brick.

"Oh, let's hear it, then," growled Fred. "Fortunately, I learned long ago how to say no."

"Oh, you want to hear it all now, do you?" jeered Bob. "You don't deserve to hear a word of it."

Neither Fred nor Larry would have been very anxious, had it not been for Brick's broad grin of enjoyment.

"Well, then," went on Bob, hastily, as if afraid his friends would change their minds, "how would it do to make the Halstead noodle a great heir?"

"It would suit him well enough, of course," Fred retorted, with a scowl. "But it wouldn't interest us any."

"Oh, we'd make him an heir for about twenty-four hours only, and he'd wake up before he handled any of the real money," explained Bob, mysteriously.

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Captain Fred, disgustedly.

"Tell 'em, Fullerton. That's the only way to put 'em wise to what a big frame-up it is," grinned Brick.

Thereupon the four young firemen drew their seats close together, talking in low tones, and Bob doing most of the talking, as he unfolded his latest.

Certainly it looked good. There wasn't any chance for the thing to recoil back on their own heads, anyway.

"Wouldn't Halstead be chesty, if he believed all those dollars were really coming his way, though?" glowed Fullerton.

"If he believed it—yes," growled Fred.

"Oh, he'd believe it, as far as that goes," put in Larry. "Halstead is one of those kind of fellows who are always ready to believe anything good about themselves."

"Well, it might work for a little while. I dare say it would," Fred admitted, slowly. "As you say, it can't come back on us. But the deception won't last for long."

"We don't want it to last for long," Bob replied, eagerly. "In fact, we want the whole bubble to burst as soon as Halstead has had time enough to make a real goat of himself. And—say—by thunder!"

"Well?" asked Fred, half suspiciously.

"We'll make him out richer than the Lesters themselves. It's a five to one bet that Halstead will be so chesty that he'll get rattled and snub Kit Lester."

"Say! That would be worth any money it costs!" cried Captain Fred, taking real notice at last. "But would he do it?"

"Sure, if he got chesty enough, as he surely would do," pressed Bob Fullerton, eagerly. "Don't you suppose that, many a time, in running around with a wealthy heiress like Kit Lester he has felt ashamed of his own poverty? Don't you suppose Halstead would very quickly take pains to let her understand that, at last, he was worth more than she could ever hope to be? With a girl like Kit Lester he'd just have to show the smallest sign of that disposition. She wouldn't keep him guessing long, then, for with all her good nature and gentleness on the surface, Kit is chockful of spirit. Let that kind of a talk get started between them, and one word would lead to another. In two minutes it would be all off between them, and then Wide could never get back in Kit's favor again after he woke up."

"By thunder, if I thought that would happen I'd rob a bank to get the money to put your trick through, Fullerton," Captain Parsons cried, eagerly.

Though Fred was now paying strong attentions to another girl, he had never gotten over the wistful desire for Mistress Kitty's tender regard.

He would have gone to any lengths to be once more her favored swain.

So now he was suddenly heart and soul in Bob's "new-est."

"How much is this thing going to cost?" demanded Fred, reflectively.

"Well, I'll have to let you fellows put the cash up," Bob admitted, ruefully. "My governor, you know, has cut down the allowance since that Fourth of July trick. I haven't got over a quarter in my pocket at this minute, and only a measly dollar coming in next week."

"How much will it cost?" insisted Fred.

Bob began to figure on the back of an envelope.

When he had done he looked up, naming the sum.

Captain Fred drew out a wallet, so well filled that Bob's eyes stuck out at the sight of the money.

Fred quickly counted out the sum, passing it over.

"Don't I have to ante on this?" asked Lieutenant Larry.

"If you've got any spare cash," warned Captain Parsons, solemnly, "hold on to it for a while. It may come in handy, later on, keeping us out of jail."

"How can this job get any of us into trouble?" demanded Fullerton, hotly.

"How should I know—now?" queried Captain Fred,

drily. "That's the trouble. We're never able to see the loaded club over our heads until after you've put your great scheme through."

"Huh!" cried Bob, excitedly, as he rose, glancing at his watch. "You all of you know, as well as I do, that there's no come-back to this scheme—at least, nothing that comes back and hits us."

"If we do get hurt again," threatened Parsons, "we'll all of us cut you out after this."

"All right," Fullerton responded, lightly. "I'll agree to that. It's a bargain. Now, it's me for a trip on the train."

Half an hour later, after having seen his mother, Fullerton was on the rail, traveling on business of great interest to Young Wide Awake.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXCITEMENT BURSTS.

"Is Captain Halstead here?"

It was Ralph Peters, the new young reporter on the Belmont "Evening Herald," who put the question at the fire-house the next morning.

The new reporter seemed eager, almost excited.

"Ye'll find him upstairs," said Terry, who was down below, carefully looking over the running gear of his beloved hose-carriage.

Peters rapidly ascended the stairs, to find Wide, Hal, Phil, Ted Lester and Ned Perkins having a comfortable social chat.

"Just a word with you, Captain Halstead, if you don't mind," broke in the new reporter, who was very young.

"Why should I mind?" smiled Wide, coming forward. "You don't look dangerous."

"Of course I'm not," retorted the reporter. "But look here. Did you see this in this morning's paper from the city?"

Peters held up one of the big dailies, pressing his thumb against an advertisement.

"Our editor spotted this," went on Peters, "and told me to come down here and find out what it all means?"

"Then you've come to the wrong place for information," rejoined Wide, after he had read the advertisement through. "I don't know a blessed thing about it."

He read the advertisement through again. It was to this effect:

"Will Anna Halstead, widow of Gerald Halstead, who was brother of late Horace Halstead, or will the son of first two named communicate with undersigned, executors for the estate of Horace Halstead?"

Then followed an address, in initials only, in the city in which the big daily was published.

"Are you the people?" asked Peters, almost trembling.

"Why, the names are all right," replied Wide, composedly. "I had an uncle, who went to Australia. We never heard from him afterwards. In fact, I don't remember him, for I was a baby when he went away."

"But you're the parties, are you?" insisted Reporter Peters.

"Why, those are the names of my parents and my uncle," Wide answered.

"Then, of course, you're the people named," rushed on Peters, excitedly. "And you're evidently heirs to a fortune."

"Maybe," said Wide.

At the first break of the news, Phil glided rapidly down the stairs to tell the news to Terry, who came about as swiftly up to stand by and listen.

"Man alive," cried Peters, "aren't you going to get excited over news like this?"

"No," rejoined Wide, composedly. "What's the use? It isn't verified. You're only guessing. It will be time to get excited when I see the money or the will."

"Aren't you going to do anything about this?" trembled the reporter.

"Why, I suppose mother or I will answer the ad."

"You suppose you will," quavered Peters. "Great Scott! You don't act as though you wanted the money, if it's really coming to you!"

"Mother and I can handle it, I guess, if it's really pressed on us," smiled Wide.

He was more interested than he allowed himself to appear.

"Well, why don't you do something now?" raged the reporter, who was more excited than all of the young firemen put together.

"Why, I'll go down and see mother. Oh, no; I forgot. She's over at Waverly this morning, taking some dictation for a lawyer."

"Then why don't you stir yourself?" demanded the reporter. "Telegraph to that address. Or, better still, get on the next train and go there."

"I reckon the telegraph will answer the purpose," said Wide, quietly.

"Here are some telegraph blanks, if you want to write the message here," said the reporter, hauling out several sheets of yellowish paper.

"Thank you," acknowledge Wide, and, taking them, went over to the table to write.

Reporter Peters, peeping over our hero's shoulder, saw him inscribe these words:

"Anna Halstead and her son, sister-in-law and nephew of Horace Halstead, can be communicated with at Belmont.

"RICHARD HALSTEAD."

"Thunder!" muttered Peters, softly. "Isn't there any excitement in the fellow?"

"Now I'll go and send this," announced Wide, rising.

But he didn't get away until the other fellows had crowded about, extending their hands and expressing their hope that he had fallen heir to a fortune.

"There was once an old man, you know," smiled Wide, "who thought little of his wife and everything of his son. When that old man was dying he sent for a lawyer and made a will leaving his house to his son. 'But,' urged the lawyer, 'there's a mortgage on the house, you know.' 'That's so,' admitted the dying man. 'Well, leave the mortgage to my wife.' You see, fellows, it may be that all mother and I get out of the estate is the mortgage."

Then our hero and Terry departed, leaving Reporter Peters consumed with wonder.

As soon as Peters got over his astonishment he hurried back to the "Herald" office.

Within ten minutes the newspaper bulletin-board told a tale that made a goodly portion of Belmont gasp with surprise.

Bob Fullerton and his fellow-plotters heard the news and chuckled in huge glee.

By the time that Wide and Terry got back from the depot, after sending the telegram, nearly all of the fellows of Washington No. 1 had reached the fire-house.

"Hope it's true, Wide!"

"Of course it's true!"

"Congratulations, old fellow!"

"If you turn out rich, you won't drop Washington No. 1, will you?"

"You won't forget your old friends, will you?"

"Do you think you'll keep on living in Belmont after you get your money?"

Laughing, Wide covered his ears with his hands.

"Fellers, stop this din!" roared Terry Rourke. "Why don't yez take a hint from Wide himself? He's not losing his head. Ye've no call to go losing yure own!"

As soon as the racket of voices had quieted, Wide looked coolly around him.

"Fellows, I don't know a blessed thing about this whole business yet. If it turns out to be a good thing, there's no use asking me what my plans are. My mother is still the head of the family, and she'll be the heir, and do all the deciding. Now, there isn't a blessed thing to be said, or done, or thought, until we have real news. So suppose we drop the whole matter and let things go on just as usual."

That didn't suit the excited Washingtons.

They wanted to talk about the big inheritance, and nothing else.

As Wide said it wasn't worth while, some of them went outside to talk it over.

And thus the news got spread faster than ever.

In less than two hours, or before noon, a telegram came to Wide:

"You and your mother inherit large fortune. Sole heirs. Stay in Belmont to receive letter going forward at once.

"JOHNSON & BENEDICT,

"Attorneys-at-law."

As the fellows had all crowded in, Wide allowed them to see the telegram.

Then the news flew faster than ever. A big, blocking crowd gathered before the "Herald's" new bulletin.

Peters came down for another interview, but Wide, except for letting him see the telegram, could tell him nothing new.

Wide felt dazed, rather than glad.

He had often longed for riches, but the sum was so big that he could not grasp it.

"Why don't you try to get your mother on the telephone?" urged Terry.

"She's busy over at Waverly, and it would only spoil her day's work," our hero answered. "Wait until we get more particular news. That letter ought to be here by to-night."

The air seemed unusually stifling here in the fire-house.

Wide and Terry started for Main Street.

But here people came forward by scores to hold out their hands, wish him all sorts of good luck, and congratulate him.

"It's a little bit early yet," was all Wide would say.

But the clamor about him became disturbing.

He slipped into his mother's office, leaving a note for her, with the telegram and a copy of the advertisement.

Then, as he and Terry came out, they boarded a car bound uptown.

That took them to the Lester house, where our hero was not likely to be annoyed.

Terry hardly spoke of the matter, for he realized Wide's desire to keep quiet.

No one followed them into the Lester grounds, but Kitty and Faith came promptly out, their faces beaming, for Ted had sent them the news by telephone.

"Oh, Dick, dear, I'm so glad!" cried Kitty, joyously, as she caught both his hands. "I do hope it's true."

Faith, too, added her happy word.

Wide told them the little he knew, so far.

Then Terry, with wise judgment, drew Faith away into a stroll across the broad lawn and under the trees.

Wide and Kitty also took to strolling, though they kept by themselves.

"It seems so odd," murmured Mistress Kitty, "to think of you as a very rich young man."

"Probably I won't be," smiled Wide. "If the news is straight, I fancy the estate will go to my mother."

"But you'll be her heir."

"That would be only natural, I suppose," smiled Wide.

"Is it—is it going to make any great difference in you?" asked Kitty, in a low voice.

"Why, yes, of course, Kit, dear. It's going to make it possible for mother and me to have about everything we could possibly ever want."

"But I don't mean that."

"Then what, dear?"

"Is it—is it—going to make any difference—between us, Dick?"

Young Wide Awake stopped as suddenly as though he had been shot.

"Do you mean——" he began, wonderingly.

"Yes, that's what I mean," she nodded, softly.

"Why, Kit, dear, if the money could make any difference, I'd curse it!" Young Wide Awake broke out, almost explosively.

Mistress Kitty pressed his arm a little harder.

"Kit Lester," spoke the young fireman, earnestly, so earnestly, in fact, that there was a choke in his voice and tears in his eyes, "nothing that can ever happen could make me think less of you. Nothing could make me think more of you, either. I simply worship you, Kit, and nothing else could count, with you gone."

"Oh, Dick!"

They had stopped in a little circle of ground, fringed around with bushes. Kitty threw up both her arms, letting them rest around Wide's neck.

Unintentionally, Terry and Faith strolled close enough to catch a glimpse of the pair at this moment.

"Come away, Faith, darlint," begged Terry, wheeling instantly. "Wide has me blar-rney stone beaten out av sight!"

"You can satisfy every wish and ambition now," murmured Kitty, presently. "What do you think you'll do, Dick, dear?"

"We'll have to get the money first."

"But when you do——"

"If we do, you mean, Kit, girl. Why, if we get the money, I shall have to be governed a good deal by mother's wishes, for she'll have the money and the say."

"I can't picture your mother refusing you anything, or hindering any of your plans," laughed Kitty. "What will you want most to do?"

"Why, I shall want to do just what I want to do as things stand now. I shall want to go through the high school, and then go to learn how to be a good civil engineer."

"You'll work, then?" asked Kitty, in a satisfied tone.

"And work hard," Wide nodded. "I want to be a civil engineer, and to build roads, bridges and the like. I want people to be able to point to a fine thing built by me, and to say: 'Dick Halstead built that, and it's a fine, honest job.'"

"Why, you can have all that career without money," cried Kitty. "You can work up to all that from a poor boy."

"There's hardly anything a poor American boy can't make of himself, if he has the sand and the grit," Wide rejoined.

"I begin to understand, then, why you don't care much about this news, why you don't get excited about it," Kitty went on. "It isn't going to make any difference in you, anyway, is it, Dick, dear?"

"Why, if it did, I should be disappointed. Kit, girl, my life has been going just about the way I wanted it to."

"Dick, dear, do you understand that I'm more pleased over the talk I've just had with you than I am over the great news itself?" Kitty asked, looking up at him.

"Are you?" he smiled.

"Yes; if I had had any doubts at all about you, Dick, dear, they would have been set at rest by this talk. You're a man, every inch of you—one of the kind who plans things and does them. Money can't spoil you, or change your nature. I'm as proud of you, dear, as I can be."

Had Terry been near at hand at this moment he might have concluded that Kitty had a blarney stone of her own.

One of the most excited of all who heard the news was Skip, the fire-house janitor.

First of all, he went in search of Blossie Elwell.

That little miss was only too glad to go out walking with her tough young bean, for she had at least a hundred questions that she wanted to ask him regarding the news.

She began firing the questions in, too, at once.

"P'chee!" protested Skip, his head in a whirl from trying to frame answers. "Give a fellow time t' tink, won't youse, Floss?"

"Do you suppose Wide and his mother will buy a great big house, now?" asked Flossie. "Like the Lester place, only bigger and handsomer?"

"I'll ask Wide, w'en he gets time t' look at me," agreed Skip.

"Now, what do you think, Skip?" persisted the little miss.

"Well, see here, Floss, wot's de use of a poor little mutt like me tryin' t' tink wot a young mill-i-on-yare is going to do wid his barrels of stuff."

"But you won't be poor—very poor, that is—after Wide

gets all that money, will you?" Flossie rattle on. "Wide 'll do something handsome for you, won't he?"

"Not unless he catches me w'en I'm asleep at de switch," protested Skip, energetically.

"But you wouldn't refuse to let him help you out on life's path, would you?" proposed Flossie, poetically.

"I can shovel me own paths in de snowtime, and in summer I don't need none. Wot?"

"But would you stop him from buying you a nice little home, or buying you a start in some good business?" insisted Flossie.

"He hain't offered none o' dem pipes, yet."

"But, if he did?"

"Floss," sighed Skip, "I'm afraid youse have got me wrong."

"What do you mean, Skip?"

"Say, youse write it down so youse won't forget it—I ain't no grafter on me frien's."

CHAPTER VI.

THE AUTO KIDNAPPING.

By night, a special delivery letter came, addressed either to Wide or to his mother.

Wide received it at the fire-house, he and Terry then hurrying down to the little Halstead cottage, where our hero's mother, who had heard the first news, was waiting.

Mrs. Halstead was now quite as calm as her son was over the extraordinary "news."

Wide did not attempt to open the letter until he had reached his mother's little parlor.

Then he found that the letter was typewritten on a regular letter-head, purporting to be from the legal firm of Johnson & Benedict.

The first part of the letter told how Horace Halstead had died, leaving his whole estate to be equally divided between Mrs. Halstead and her son.

Many other particulars were added, including the statement that Johnson & Benedict were the executors, and that the estate could be quickly turned over.

The letter wound up with:

"Do not come here to see us. We shall be tremendously busy with your affairs for the next few days. After that we shall take pleasure in coming to see you. In the meantime, if you can identify yourselves as the relatives of Horace Halstead at your local bank, you are authorized to draw upon us a sight draft for twenty thousand dollars, which we will promptly honor."

It was the return of this draft, dishonored, and with the statement that no such firm of lawyers could be found, that Bob Fullerton and his fellow-plotters relied upon as the crushing blow to Wide's dream.

"Shall you put the draft through the bank, mother?" Wide asked, a little while after he had finished reading the letter aloud.

"I don't know, Dick," his mother answered. "We don't need any money just at present, do we?"

Reporter Peters dashed in while the matter was still undecided.

Mrs. Halstead allowed the young reporter to take a copy of the letter from the supposed firm of lawyers.

The contents of that letter were soon up on the "Herald's" bulletin-board, and Belmont had more to talk about.

As for Wide, his head tired with the whirl of it all, he went to bed rather early that night, as did also his mother.

In the morning, however, they had another siege before them.

People of all sorts and conditions besieged Mrs. Halstead's little typewriting office on Main Street.

There were half a dozen real estate agents, some of them from out of town, who wanted to induce Mrs. Halstead to buy large estates.

There were solicitors for various charities, each of whom seemed to hope to get a large subscription.

Several local dressmakers and tailors came in, in the hope of securing large orders for clothing from Wide and his mother.

There were no end of other kinds of people, all expecting to get sums of money, in one way or another.

"But I haven't got any money yet," sighed wearied Mrs. Halstead.

"Oh, that's all right! You're going to have," urged her tormentors. "You'll have money just as soon as your draft gets through the bank."

"But I haven't put the draft in at the bank, yet," Mrs. Halstead replied.

"Then you ought to do so at once. Anyway, your credit is good for anything that you want to order or subscribe."

"My mother is doing absolutely no business with the new fortune until she gets it," Wide felt obliged to announce, at last.

Then he posted a notice to the same effect outside of her office door.

After a while our hero succeeded in driving away the eager crowd of money-hunters.

At last mother and son had time to think, for Terry had arrived and had stationed himself outside in the corridor.

Terry drove away a swarm of people, but at last encountered a puzzle.

Two middle-aged men, smooth of look and manner, and faultlessly dressed in black, with spotless white linen, presented themselves to Rourke, with the cards of Bristow & Packer, lawyers.

They talked to Terry until the latter went into Mrs. Halstead's office with the cards.

"They say they're liars—Oi mean lawyers, ma'am—come to see yez about the fortune," Terry announced.

"Oh, let them in, then," sighed Mrs. Halstead.

"State your business quickly, please," said Wide, briskly, as he placed chairs for the smooth-looking callers. "My mother is tired, and soon will be out of patience."

"We have come to suggest how we can save her all this annoyance," began Bristow, glibly. "What your mother needs is a firm of eminent lawyers like—ahem!—ourselves. Let her sign the necessary papers authorizing us to act, and we will deal with every one for her, including the executors. Have you any idea, madam—but of course you haven't—how scoundrelly some executors are? Now, with us to watch your interests at every point——"

"Hold on, sir," broke in Wide, without even glancing toward his mother. "We don't know who you are. We never saw you before, and never even heard of you. If

we are heirs to a big fortune, and you imagine we are going to put our case confidently in the hands of persons unknown to us, we will simply wish you good morning."

"But, my dear young man," broke in Packer, quickly, you——"

"Good morning," repeated our hero, firmly.

"You don't understand," urged Bristow.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Wide, in a louder tone, as he opened the door.

"But, my dear Mr. Halstead——" protested Packer.

"Just consider for a moment," began Bristow.

"Terry, is your muscle all right?" asked Young Wide Awake. "Here are two men who actually insist on being bounced. Which one would you prefer to handle?"—as Rourke paused, grinning, in the doorway.

Both young firemen drew off their coats, tossing them aside, and started to roll up their sleeves.

By this time the lawyers concluded to take the very broad hint.

They went, though not without informing our hero that they could be found at the Carrollton House.

"If this is what it means to be very rich, I want to wake up," cried Mrs. Halstead, nervously.

"Mother, wouldn't you enjoy sitting here and resting behind a locked door?" hinted Wide.

"Yes, indeed, if I were sure no one could get in."

Wide wrote on a sheet of paper:

"Shall not return to-day."

This he tacked up on the outside of the office door, after which he and Terry left, while Mrs. Halstead locked the door after them.

Twice on the street, that forenoon, Messrs. Bristow & Packer tried to force themselves upon our hero.

But each time our hero succeeded in driving them away.

"My dear fellow," muttered Packer to his partner, at last, "the woman would be easy enough, but that young man is our stumbling-block."

"Stumbling-blocks generally behave best when they are removed," replied the other smooth one.

"Besides it may be that a heavy ransom would offer us more than we could hope to obtain in any other way."

"Let us get by ourselves and talk this matter over."

Messrs. Bristow & Packer did not again attempt to address either mother or son that eventful day.

Bob and Fred, Larry and Brick Houston, were on the streets much of the time that day, enjoying to the full the excitement that had been stirred up in Belmont.

"But it's funny that Halstead or his mother don't try to send the draft for twenty thousand dollars through," muttered Fred, who had learned at his father's bank that no such draft had been presented for collection.

"Humph! They may have put it through some other bank," remarked Bob. "The Halsteads don't like your family any to well."

"There's Anita Duroc," spoke Larry, suddenly. "She looks as though she wanted to speak with you."

Fred turned, saw his new sweetheart driving her car in at the curb, and hurried toward her.

"Has the Belmont excitement made any change in your tea-party affair for this afternoon?" asked Fred, as he took Anita's hand.

"Why, none of the Belmont girls are coming," replied

Miss Duroc. "Every one of them sent prettily expressed regrets."

"They're all too excited over the news of the fortune Halstead has come into, I suppose," sneered Fred.

"No; they sent their regrets before anything was known about it," pouted Anita. "I can't understand it, unless they mean to hint to me that they don't care to know me."

"Nonsense," said Fred, quickly. "Anita, some day you'll find out that this same Halstead was behind the sending of the regrets. It's a job he has put up, the mean fellow!"

"Oh, I don't believe that," protested Miss Duroc. "I'm sure he's too nice a young fellow for that."

"Are you?" queried Fred, scowling, darkly.

"Yes; he's much too manly to mix himself up in a girl's affair, anyway. He's just the kind of a young man who can be depended upon to keep out of girls' squabbles. So he is coming into a great fortune. I must say that I'm downright glad over the news!"

"Then won't you let us change the subject, please?" asked Fred, rather tartly. "You know I don't like the fellow. Why, he's so chesty already over the news that no one can get near him."

"That doesn't look like it," remarked Anita, nodding to a point up the street on the other side, where Wide stood chatting in a group of a dozen of his Washington comrades.

Soon after Miss Duroc drove her touring car off in the direction of Waverly.

People had ceased to bother Wide in the street with either congratulations or questions.

He was as pleasant as ever with every one, yet something in his manner kept the curious or eager at bay.

In the heat of the noon-hour, when nearly every one was within doors, Mrs. Halstead hurried from her office to her home, where she again locked the doors and failed to answer rings at the bell.

The "Evening Herald" was still making the most of its welcome sensation, but the people of the little city were at last growing calm over the affair.

In the evening, after Mrs. Halstead had gone to visit friends on whose sympathy she could depend, Wide and Terry went up to the Lester house.

John Lester and his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Vane received the young people, and congratulated our hero.

Mr. Lester, who had heard from Kitty an account of part of the conversation of the afternoon before, took a more kindly interest in our hero than ever before.

But after a little while the old people withdrew, leaving the young people to themselves.

"Why not stroll down the road?" suggested Kitty. "It looks quiet enough, and it will seem good to us to get off the grounds for the first time to-day."

So they strolled along, Wide and Kitty in the lead, Faith and Terry some two hundred feet to the rear.

The road was lonely at this point, but none of the young people had any thought of being afraid of harm.

Yet suddenly, from behind a tree, two big, rough-looking men stepped out.

One of them made a dive for Young Wide Awake, grappling with him.

Kitty uttered a scream, as one of the ruffians almost

threw her back against a fence, then turned to help his pal attack our hero.

Wide fought back hard, for a few seconds.

But two more powerful-looking men leaped over the fence and joined in.

Up came Terry on the run, but the strongest of the four pounced upon him, bearing him to the ground.

Then, while both girls were screaming for help, a big, black automobile was driven close to the spot and halted.

Terry's assailant now struck him a dazing blow in the face.

Then, in a flash, Wide was lifted into the car, still fighting, though nearly senseless.

In a twinkling more the automobile was bounding away, bearing Wide a captive.

Three helpless, astounded, indignant young people were left behind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRICK BY WIRE.

"O-o-o-oh!" shuddered Kitty Lester, sick and faint.

For, to her heated imagination, such a vicious attack on Young Wide Awake, coupled with such a swift kidnapping, could mean nothing less than his coming murder.

Faith had run up swiftly, her horror and indignation overcoming any fear she might otherwise have felt.

Now Terry stood between them, an arm around each, for both girls seemed likely to faint.

"Oh, Terry," gasped Faith, "can't you do anything?"

"Bedad, Oi can—at least, Oi can thry blamed hard!"

"Then do it at once," begged Kitty, frantically.

"Thin turn, gurruls, and run as fast as ye can wid me to the house. 'Tis from there Oi'll wake the counthry over the tiliphone."

"Don't wait for us," begged Kitty, though she and Faith had instantly began to run, putting off fainting until there should be time for such a luxury.

"But 'tis a lonely road to leave yez on, gurruls," protested young Rourke.

"Run!" commanded Faith, in a fiery tone. "Don't stop to think of us! Don't dare to!"

Rourke waited to hear no more, but made his feet fly as fast as he could.

Reaching the big Lester mansion, and finding the front door open, he never waited to explain to any one or to ask leave, but dashed at the telephone.

"Give me the police station," he begged as soon as Central answered. "Hurry, too."

In another instant Rourke was pouring his tale into the startled ears of Chief John Sharp.

Nor did either waste many words.

Terry described the automobile, which was without a number tag, and described also the men.

"Stay right where you are, for a call," directed Chief Sharp.

"Bedad, Oi might as well, since me feet wud niver catch up wid that locomotive wagon," muttered Terry.

By the time he gained the porch, Kitty and Faith had arrived, breathless.

To them Terry told of the start of the chase.

An automobile is not easily lost on any road—especially one that has no number tag.

Within a few minutes people were stirring and watching on many a road in the surrounding country.

Once the automobile was located by any watcher, it would be a simple matter to telephone down the road.

In the meantime, Wide, not by any means senseless, though still weak after his hard fight and rough handling, found himself on the back seat of the car, wedged between two powerful men, who kept a tight, crushing grip on him.

Before him, almost kneeling in our hero's lap, stood a third ruffian.

"You might shout out and make a fuss," warned one of the men. "If you do, it will be the last noise you'll ever make."

So our hero made up his mind to keep quiet, at any rate, until he saw some good to be had from shouting.

In a very short space of time the automobile had whizzed through the most lonely streets of Belmont, and out into the more open country beyond.

Yet, even here, a hidden watcher saw the automobile go whirring by, and then a telephone message traveled swiftly down the road.

Of a sudden the driver of the flying car saw the road heaped with obstacles ahead.

Plainly it meant death to lunge ahead into that formidable-looking barrier.

Nor was there time to manouver, backing and turning, and getting headed the other way.

Besides, without a doubt, these kidnappers would now find the road closed at some point behind them.

From around the barrier more than a dozen men came racing.

"Scoot, fellows!" shouted the driver of the auto. "We're dished."

The instant that the big car came to a stop all of Young Wide Awake's captors dashed over the sides, abandoning him, since all felt sure that he would fight like a fiend sooner than allow himself to be carried along.

Any fight by Wide, however quickly quelled by his captors, must result in hindering their flight, and the members of the posse were closing in.

As he found himself alone in the car, the young fire captain, though a good deal shaken up, promptly crawled over into the front seat.

He had a hand on the speed lever by the time the foremost member of the posse reached the car.

Yet the car was useless for pursuit, for the fleeing ruffians had been shrewd enough to take to the fields at one side of the road.

"Keep the car where you are!" called the leader of the posse.

Then began a hard, determined chase.

With the start they had had, and with fear of prison to urge them forward, three out of the five got away.

Two, however, were brought back by the grim-looking men of the posse.

"I reckon Chief Sharp, of Belmont, will want these fellows," said the citizen who had led the posse.

"That's where they are wanted, all right," nodded our hero.

"It was Chief Sharp who telephoned to us to be on the

lookout," continued the citizen. "Then we got a message from up the road. We had our barrier waiting and ready for business."

"But how did you come not to shoot at me, thinking I was one of the gang?" queried Young Wide Awake.

"Why, you're Captain Halstead, of the Belmont fire department, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, we were tipped off that you were the one to be rescued. My, but inheriting a fortune brings a fellow into danger these days, doesn't it?"

"If that was the cause of my being kidnapped, and I suppose it was," nodded young Halstead. "But say, can't one of you telephone to Mr. Sharp now? I have a mother and friends who will be about crazy until they hear that I'm safe."

While one of the posse hurried away to the nearest telephone, it was arranged that two more men should get into the big car with the captured kidnappers, whose hands had been tied.

Wide certainly kept mighty close to the speed limit as he raced back to Belmont.

He was obliged to slow up somewhat as he entered the city through the back streets.

As he drew up before the police station, the two citizens and their prisoners got out, while Chief Sharp came out to help.

Then, as quickly as Wide had his engine attended to, he hurried into the station-house after the others.

"Where's Rourke?" was his first question.

"Up at Lester's."

"Can I use your 'phone?"

"Certainly. But of course they've got the news."

Nevertheless, Wide got Terry over the wire.

"Hurroo!" was Terry's ejaculation, as soon as he recognized his chum's voice.

"My love to the girls, Terry," said Wide. "Can you wait where you are for me a little while?"

"Can't I, though!"

"All right. I'll be up there as quickly as I can."

The two prisoners were thoroughly sulky, refusing to answer any of Sharp's questions.

So the little police chief took them below and locked them up without wasting more time.

"Now, where do you want the auto, chief?" Wide asked.

"Anywhere, lad, except in front of the station-house."

"But what shall I do with the machine?"

"I don't know. In fact, it's none of my business, Wide. I have nothing to do with the auto. I didn't capture it, or arrest it."

"Then what shall I do?"

"Take it to a garage, if you want to. I repeat, that I have nothing to do with it. Don't turn it over to any owner, either, unless he proves his property thoroughly."

"Then I'm stuck with the board of an automobile on my hands, am I?" grimaced Wide.

"Not exactly," smiled Chief Sharp. "The bill for keeping the car is payable by the owner when he turns up."

"At least," said Wide, turning to the two citizens, "I can offer to take you back to your homes."

That he did, driving fast. Then, on his return, he headed for the Lester home.

Honk! honk! he sounded, as he turned in through the broad gateway.

That brought the young people to him in a hurry, as he slowed the car down and stopped.

"Jump in and have a ride, if you want," invited Wide.

"Why, that looks like the very car you were carried off in!" cried Kitty.

"I think it is," laughed Wide. "That being the case, the car certainly owes us all a pleasant spin. Will you go?"

"Will we?" echoed Kitty, happy over anything at all, now that her young fireman was safe once more.

But Mr. Lester came out, handing a revolver to Terry as the latter seated himself beside Faith in the rear seat.

"Slip this under the cushion, Rourke. There may be more trouble abroad to-night. If you meet it, you can use the weapon while young Halstead works the speed lever."

What was left of the moon came up late while they were on the road.

It was a glorious trip, the motion of the car supplying them with a breeze that could be obtained only in motion.

Wide avoided lonely streets, however.

For one thing, he did not want to run the risk of bringing the girls near any scene of trouble.

"Who on earth do you suppose could have been back of that attempt?" Kitty asked, anxiously.

"I've been racking my brain for the answer to that," Wide told her. "I can't think of any enemy I have that's rich enough to hire a gang like that and mean enough to do it."

"It couldn't have been Fred Parsons, could it?" Kitty inquired.

"I don't believe it was."

"Of course he's sore about his trial last week."

"But he wouldn't go this far to get square. Of that I feel rather certain."

Of course, the young people were recognized.

As but few people in Belmont had heard of the kidnapping as yet, the story flew around that Young Wide Away was beginning to spend some of his new money already.

Parsons and Fullerton, strolling up Main Street, saw the car whizz by.

"Whew!" chuckled Bob. "I wonder if Halstead has gone and bought that car on the strength of his new fortune?"

"It must be," admitted Fred, then grinned in huge relish of the humiliation that must soon come to his rival.

"Say, it would be fun," sputtered Bob. "if Halstead has already presented that car to Kit Lester. Say, won't he feel hang-dog cheap when he has to tell her it was all a mistake?"

"There's one thing I do notice," growled Fred, disappointedly. "As yet the supposed fortune hasn't brought about any misunderstanding that makes Kit turn her back on him."

"She'll do that when she finds the fortune is all a fake," predicted Fullerton.

But Fred only sniffled at that prophecy.

Somehow, the captain of Neptune No. 2 couldn't help

feeling that the big joke wasn't turning out quite as badly as he had hoped for.

"How long are you going to have this car?" asked Mistress Kitty, as Wide helped her to the ground before her home veranda.

"Until the owner comes and proves property," Wide replied. "I hope it won't be for a day or two yet, and I shall be up every day to ask you and Faith out for a spin as long as my ownership pretends to last."

"Dhrive to my house now, will yez?" asked Terry, as the two chums sped down Main Street.

"Just what I was going to do," Wide answered.

"And Oi'll jist tell me mother thot Oi'm going up to spind the night wid yez."

"What's that for, Terry?"

"Afther what happened the night, Oi'm thinking thot it's bist for two av us to be togither during the night," Terry returned. "D'yez mind, Oi brought along the revolver Mr. Lesther was afther giving me the loan av."

After Terry had left word at home, Wide again turned, driving the car to Weber's garage, where he put it up for the night.

Then they turned their steps toward the Halstead cottage.

Mrs. Halstead had just returned. She had heard no word of the abduction, nor did the young firemen enlighten her about it.

"I'll place the gun between the two pillows, where either av us can get it in a hurry," Terry whispered, as the chums undressed.

They talked in low tones for a couple of minutes after turning in.

Then both were as sound asleep as though no thought of peril could exist in the world.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEPTUNE ON DECK.

Reporter Peters felt certain that wonders would never cease.

That night and the next morning brought to his net the fine fish of the attempt to kidnap the young fire captain.

Reporter Peters took it for granted that whoever was back of the kidnapping had done it with the purpose of holding the rich young heir with the object of demanding a heavy ransom for Wide's release.

And that, too, was the general view in Belmont.

Mrs. Halstead was greatly worried when at last the news came to her ears.

"Wealth is bringing us nothing but troubles and worries," she told herself, as she hid for the forenoon behind the locked door of her little office. "Oh, dear, I wish I could wake up and find that it all isn't true."

Wide had not seen her since their meeting at breakfast.

Since that time he had been at the fire-house, first inspecting the machines and all the apparatus, next waiting comfortably for whatever might turn up.

For hours about the only thing that turned up was a fair attendance of the members of the company.

Every one in Belmont was now talking about the Halstead millions.

Here at the fire-house the members of the fire company enjoyed the luxury of hearing everything at first hand.

Many of the fellows went through the pretense of playing checkers or dominoes.

Wide and Terry were denied their former pleasure of sitting in the shade just outside the fire-house door, through our hero's dread of the congratulations and questions that had become a burden to him.

Everything else palling after awhile, it came as a rather welcome relief, when, just before eleven o'clock, there came a sudden zing! on the gong downstairs.

For a few seconds the young firemen sat where they were, counting.

"That's Neptune's box," said Joe, at last, with an air of relief.

"But we assist at that box," replied Wide, making a break for the sliding-pole.

The rest followed him down, all making a hustle to get into their fire togs.

"Assist, eh?" growled Joe, as he drew his boots on. "Can any one imagine firemen sinking lower than to have to play second fiddle to Neptune at a fire?"

It did sound tough, any way they looked at it.

"Swing on to the machines now!" shouted Wide, as the third round of the alarm ended.

There was a rush for places, the invariable light little cheer as they darted out with engine and hose-carriage.

Yet they took it rather easy, after all, though they jogged.

The overhead sun was hot, and Neptune, whose house was much nearer to the box from which the alarm had come, could make swift time to the box if Captain Fred and his comrades chose to exert themselves.

"That young Captain Halstead is just as big a hustler for fires as he was before the fortune came his way," Wide heard some one on the sidewalk say.

Washington went around a final corner, at last, and came upon the scene of the fire.

It was a three-story wooden building on a side street that was afire, all the smoke that was visible coming from the second story.

Neptune, under Fred's noisy, excited command, was just rushing the nozzle in through the front door.

Wide left Hal to couple to a second hydrant, some distance from the fire, and went forward to investigate, followed by his staunch aide, Ted Lester.

The fire was brisk enough; still it didn't seem like such a much to handle, if taken promptly.

Larry had gone up inside with the nozzlemen, while Captain Fred stayed down on the sidewalk to see what would happen.

Just as Wide drew near and Fred regarded him scowlingly, Hook and Ladder No. 1 drew up.

"Some of you firemen get me down, if you can, please," called a girl's shrill voice from a window on the top floor. "The stairs are too filled with smoke."

The girl, who was rather buxom and pretty, did not seem in the least excited.

"All right, sister," called up Captain Tom Scott, of the hook and ladder crew. "Coming directly."

He quickly had off one of his long ladders and placed it in position against the front of the house.

"Hold on," ejaculated Captain Fred, darting forward, as Scott placed his big hands on the side of the ladder. "This is my job."

"Take it, son," replied Captain Tom, drily, and moved away.

"Now we'll let Halstead see that he isn't the only one who can make rescues," muttered Fred.

He glanced up the ladder, unable to see that he was taking any huge risk in going up after the girl himself.

Then, nimbly enough, and aware that the eyes of scores of people below were on him, Captain Fred Parsons went nimbly up the ladder to the sill of that window on the third floor.

Now that he got closer he noted, with a trifle of dismay, that the girl looked bigger than she had from the sidewalk below.

"You're no lightweight, are you?" muttered Fred.

"A hundred and forty-nine," replied the girl, with a smile. "But say!"

"Well?"

"If you'll get down a little way I think I can manage to get down by myself. The ladder looks steady enough."

"No, you don't!" retorted Fred, with sudden energy.

He was afraid of the guying he would get if he ran up the ladder only to go back empty-handed, while the girl "saved" herself.

"Put your arms around my neck and hold on tight," directed Fred, as he swung his left arm around her.

"But I can get down just as well without help," she persisted.

"No, you can't."

"Oh, but I'm sure I can."

"Put your arms around my neck and hold on, as I directed you," ordered Captain Fred.

Rather than have any scene, the girl obeyed, though she pouted in her displeasure.

Now Fred began to descend.

Whew! How heavy she was, now that he had only one hand with which to hold to the ladder.

Yet Fred kept on downward until he was opposite the floor below.

"Ain't I pretty heavy?" asked the girl.

"Yes," Fred admitted, in a tone which seemed to imply that her weight was all her own fault.

"Put me down, then, and I'll get down by myself."

"No, you don't."

Fred got down two rungs lower, still holding her in his arms.

Then his strength seemed all but to give out.

"Swing your feet around on the rung," he ordered, desperately.

He helped the girl in the movement, then rested with both hands on the side of the ladder, panting and with his legs trembling under him.

"I know I'm awfully heavy," said the girl.

"I'll have you down safe in a moment."

"Get a derrick, Parsons," geyed some one in the crowd.

This sounded mightily different from the rousing cheers that Wide sometimes got when performing a thrilling rescue.

Fred bit his lips with rage, then prepared to take a fresh hold on this troublesome girl and get her down to the sidewalk.

Yet, just as he reached, Fred felt a stinging from one of his shins.

Glancing swiftly down, he saw a little tongue of flame reaching out at him from the side of the building.

Being burned alive was no part of Captain Fred's plan in life.

With a gasp he slid down the ladder, holding on by the sides.

"Hey! You forgot something!" geyed some one in the crowd.

"The Neptunes are the real thing!" laughed another voice.

The girl still hung with her feet on the rungs.

She started to descend, then caught a glimpse of the tongue of flame leaping out.

That brought her to a halt.

Uttering an oath of disgust over his captain, Brick Houston snatched up a rubber blanket and sprang forward to the ladder.

In a twinkling Brick was just below the girl, carefully wrapping the rubber blanket about her.

Then, lifting the girl on to one strong arm, Brick made the descent in about double-quick time, escaping without a burn.

"Thank you," said the girl, drily, as Brick set her on the sidewalk on her feet.

"Me?" questioned Brick. "Wot fer?"

"For not being afraid," replied the girl, as she shot a half-withering glance at the Neptune captain.

Fred had unslung his trumpet, bringing it forward to use in shouting orders to Brick, had not that young man been so prompt over a most ordinary piece of rescue work.

"I'm sorry, if you think I abandoned you," broke in Fred, standing there, trumpet in hand, turning nearly every color of the rainbow. "I slipped down to get a rubber blanket—that was all."

"Of course," replied the girl, quizzically. "Your bravery is undoubted, Captain Parsons."

Fred turned on his heel, grinding out an oath under his breath.

Then he saw something that made him doubly ugly.

For there, leaning against the wall of the brick building adjoining the burning one, was Young Wide Awake.

That in itself wouldn't have meant anything, but there was a grin on Wide's face.

"See here, Halstead," cried Fred, taking an angry step toward our hero. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Yes," Wide admitted, coolly, "and it's rude, I know, but really I can't help it."

That was like adding fuel to blazing oil.

"You stuck-up young prig!" glared Fred.

Lifting his trumpet, he hurled it at our hero's head.

But Wide saw it coming and dodged nimbly.

It had been hurled with such force that, after landing hard against the brick wall, it fell to the sidewalk, jammed out of shape.

No look of anger crossed Wide's face. It was too funny. He stood in his new position, smiling.

There might have been trouble between the captains, but another alarm began to strike.

"Fourteen!" counted Wide. "You don't seem to need our help here, Captain Parsons, and that box calls us away."

At a hand signal from his captain, Hal had directed the rapid uncoupling and coiling of the Washington hose.

"That box comes from a tenement-house section," shouted Wide, as he darted down among his fellows. "There's likely to be a tough fire fight on our hands. Swing on lively. I'm going to set you a good pace."

With Wide and Hal at their head, the Washingtons fairly raced through the streets.

CHAPTER IX.

DROPPING INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

It was, indeed, a tough fire!

Wide needed but one glance to make him purse his lips.

He saw here a fight before him that would tax the energies of the entire fire department.

The fire was in one of a half block of four-story tenement houses, the blaze being on the second and third floors.

A crowd had quickly gathered. For that matter, the people who had escaped from the tenements made a very respectable-sized crowd in themselves.

"Get that stream going as quick as ever you can, Hal," panted Wide, as he left the hose and engine at the nearest hydrant and sped forward into the crowd.

"See here, friends," called our hero, "is every one out of that building?"

"I think so," nodded a man.

"Don't anybody know?"

Several shook their heads.

These people, having saved themselves, had apparently supposed that every one else was safe.

Wide took a swift survey of the fire.

"It'll have to be ladder and window work," he announced, swiftly, to Terry and Ted. "We're needed on one floor, and Torrent ought to be here for the other floor. Ted, tell Chief Pelton that I think we ought to have Torrent here on the jump—that is, if you see the chief before I do."

Hook and Ladder's running-bell sounded now at the corner.

Wide waited only long enough to secure a ladder and get it up at a second-story window.

He sent Hal and the nozzle-squad up this ladder, and then, knowing well that his lieutenant would do all that could possibly be done with the stream, he turned to Captain Scott.

"Tom," said Wide, "we ought to get a ladder crew up into the second story and another on the third floor."

"Right," nodded Scott. "In a crowded house like that we don't know how many babies or sick people may have been left by folks who went out on errands."

A hand signal from Scott, first with two fingers held up, and then with three, brought ladders, on the jump, for the second and third story windows.

Wide and his crew helped in the quick placing of these.

"And another one for the top floor," urged our hero.

While this last was being placed, Captain Scott dashed up to the second story, followed by two of his men.

Wide, Terry and Ted hastened up to the third floor.

On both floors the searchers found the same condition. Though they could get a little way into the rooms, the flames beat them back from crossing the central hallway to the rooms at the rear.

Wide and his friends found no human being in the part that they could explore.

They called out loudly, but the crackling of flames, the roar of water and the noises of the streets dinned above all.

From below came a cheer as Captain Tom appeared at a window on his floor and came down rapidly, with a sleeping infant in his arms.

"Nothing here," said Wide, quickly. "Come on, then. We'll hustle up to the floor above, if Scott isn't already up the ladder."

But Scott was pushing his way through the crowd in search of a mother for the infant.

"After me," ordered Wide, as soon as his feet touched the ground.

He went lightly up that other ladder to the top floor, still followed closely by Terry and Ted.

Here the flames had not yet reached, though the smoke was thick.

As they prowled, swiftly, Wide suddenly halted, listening.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Help! Help!"

It seemed to come from the back of the house, though with all the noise about them it was hard to determine.

Wide dashed swiftly through, reaching a closed rear window and throwing it up.

"We can work here," he cried, with satisfaction. "Here's a fire-escape."

Yet, as he and Terry leaped out on the iron balcony, both gave a snort of disgust.

It looked as though the owner had started to build a fire-escape, but had stopped after putting this one balcony in place.

There was no ladder leading below, nor any balcony nearer the ground.

"Did any one here call for help?" bellowed Wide, at his loudest, using his trumpet to carry his voice further.

"Help, for heaven's sake. Don't let us burn here!" appealed an agonized voice.

The head of a rather oldish man was thrust out from a window below, to the right of them.

Smoke and flames were leaping out everywhere.

This was the only window at which a human being had much show to live, and even here the smoke and hot air would soon deprive any human being of life.

Wide felt a dull ache at his heart as he glanced down at that frenzied face.

"How many of you are there?" called Wide.

"Two!" called a woman's voice, as she thrust her head over her husband's shoulder. "Me and my man."

She was a much younger woman, strong and brave-looking.

"Save my husband first, if you can," she called, bravely. "He's been sick and he's still weak. The smoke and the fright are killing him."

"Keep as cool as you can down there," Wide called, reassuringly. "We'll rig up some way to get you out. Never fear."

Then to young Lester he turned, with the sharp order:

"Ted, run through to the ladder and pass word for Hal and Joe to come here. Phil Scott is at the nozzle and knows what to do there. Don't block the ladder to keep Hal and Joe back. Let them get up first. Then you duck down fast, and bring up some lines. You hustle, too, when your turn comes."

Ted stood on one foot until he was sure he had heard the last word.

Then he raced away.

"Can yez really do annything?" asked Terry, in a low voice of horror.

"I don't know yet," Wide answered, also in a low voice. "But I'm going to try. Terry, we've got to drop down into the jaws of death in the effort."

"Oi've been there before," retorted Rourke, coolly, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why don't you do something," shrieked the man, "instead of standing up there, talking?"

"We've sent for comrades to help us," Wide called down, as cheerily as he could. "As soon as they get here you'll see us stirring to get you out of that hot place."

The woman had drawn her head in again. Probably, with the instinct of her sex, she had gone groping through the smoke to see if she could not find something of value to take with her when rescue came.

After what seemed an age, Joe Darrell dashed through the room behind them and stood with them on the fire-escape balcony.

Hal was right behind.

Wide, in the meantime, had been forming his plan.

"Hal and Joe, stand here, bracing yourselves against the iron sides and bend over, swinging Terry, head down, by the legs. Get an awfully good grip on him!"

Terry, with a reckless laugh in his eyes, took off his boots and went over the railing, pausing long enough to give Hal and Joe time to get a good grip on his legs, near the ankles.

"Now swing him down as far as you can," Wide directed, himself leaning over and calculating distances swiftly with his eyes.

Terry reached far down into space, such an excellent bend did Hal and Joe contrive to get.

"How is it, Terry? Can you stand it, old fellow?" asked our hero, anxiously.

"Shure, Oi could eat me dinner down here," Rourke shot back.

"Can you hold me if I climb down over you?"

"Av course!"

"Get a good grip now," whispered Wide, "for you've got to hold both of us—and a third party."

"We'll do it," gritted Hal, "or go over to the ground with you."

"Be ready, Terry!"

"Ready 'tis!" came, undauntedly, up from below.

"Never mind me at all," directed the young fire captain. "Just hang on to Terry."

Then our hero went over the rail, feet first, grappling

with Terry's rigid body and passing himself down the length of it.

"Get hold of my arms," ordered Wide.

Then Rourke began to lower Wide, feet first, until he had hold of the young fire captain just under the arm-pits.

"Now give us the pendulum swing!" Wide shouted up, and Hal and Joe obeyed.

"Catch hold of my leg! We'll get you out of this or go down together!" cheered Wide, as Hal and Joe swung Terry and himself, pendulum fashion, toward the terrified fire victim.

It was a deed of appalling peril in the jaws of death!

CHAPTER X.

THE STRAIN THAT KILLS.

As Wide's feet swung over, the man caught at his legs, with a frenzied grasp.

"Bully!" cheered Wide. "Now tighten your grip, and swing out of the window. Hold on to me for all you're worth, and we'll soon have you safe."

"I'm afraid!" whined the frightened man, though he still kept his grip.

"Oh, come now! No man ever saved his life by being scared," urged the young fire captain. "Just cast yourself loose from the window. We'll soon have you up above."

"How are you going to do it?" faltered the man.

"See here," spoke Wide, more sharply, "hurry up and obey, or you'll kill a couple of us and only be left where you are to roast. Now then—swing out of that window!"

"Go ahead, Abner! Obey! It's our only chance for life!" cried the woman.

To help out, she seized the old man's weakened body in her own strong, young arms and helped to push him out clear of the window.

A shriek came from the panic-smitten man, but his fright did not cause him to let go.

On the contrary, he held on with a strength that was amazing.

"Now reach a little higher up with one hand," urged Wide. "That's right. Now a little higher, still."

As speedily as he could, Wide got a grip on the man's coat with one of his hands.

Then, after a tug upward, he managed to entwine his other hand in the cloth.

"You're doing all right now," panted Wide. "Now I'll help you. Try to reach up and get hold of my friend above. Climb right along, friend, and remember that you can wrap your legs around us to help."

The old man was making slow progress, holding on with the strength of desperation.

The wear and tear on the muscles of the young firemen was tremendous.

It was the strain that kills when it is long kept up.

At this moment Ted Lester crept swiftly through the open window.

Ted did not speak as he stood out at the rail, now a part of this thrilling scene.

Dropping the other lines at his feet, Ted swiftly rigged a slip-noose at the end of a light but strong line.

With this he made a cast that failed.

At the second effort, however, he caught the noose around one of the man's dangling legs, just above the ankle.

It required a dexterous throw and a swift upward pull just at the right fraction of a second.

But Ted managed to catch the noose.

Now bracing himself as strongly as he could, the young fireman began to haul in the line.

It was not so much weight that Lester could pull, without fear of hauling the old man loose altogether, but Ted gave the utmost aid that he could, and every pound that the burden on the human pendulum was lightened helped by just that much.

It encouraged the old man, too, to feel that sustaining line about one leg.

Yet not even young Lester's helping rope made the job easy.

The strain was still terrific on the young firemen.

At last, however, the old man's shoulders got up to where Ted could drop the line, seizing the rescued fire victim by the shoulders.

Soon after they had the old man on the balcony.

A hoarse, rousing cheer broke from an open window across the way, some hundred and fifty feet distant.

There several people were gathered, watching Wide's bravest rescue, with bated breath.

"Now swing back again, quick, fellows" shouted up Young Wide Awake, for the young woman, pallid-faced but still steady and brave, waited at the smoke-bound window.

Another great heave, and Hal and Joe landed him over there, swinging from Terry's arms.

With the sureness of true courage, the woman caught at the hero's legs.

Wide hung there for an instant.

"Got a good grip?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the young woman, tightening her hold. "I'll swing out when you say so."

"Right now, then!"

The woman cast herself free of the window-sill as bravely as though there was not a big chance of her being dashed, with her rescuer, to the cement-laid courtyard, three stories below.

They swung in air again, under the fire-escape balcony.

Across the way the watchers again feared almost to breathe.

"You ought to be able to climb up nicely," cheered Wide.

The woman's answer was to let go with one hand and make a quick grab at his trousers, just above the knee.

Her next reach caught at his belt.

"Bully!" throbbed Wide. "There's no scare in you, madam."

Now Ted managed to make a cast that caught one of the woman's feet.

She was perfectly cool now, anxious only to get up to safety before the strain should cause a break in the pendulum that should cost two brave young firemen their lives.

A few moments more of hard work, and Ted helped the woman over the rail to the side of her trembling husband.

"Now try to make a cast for me, Ted," Wide called, coolly, though he felt his strength fast going, and he knew that matters must fare at least as hard with Terry Rourke.

As Wide found himself just over the railing of the iron balcony he leaned weakly against the rail, yet reached over both arms to give added hold on Rourke.

That young Irishman was now quickly hauled up to safety.

He was quiet, yet white-faced from the strain, as he put his boots on again.

Rescuers and rescued stepped in through the open window, making their way through the smoke to the front of the house.

"Captain Scott," sang down Wide, "send up two of your men, please."

The two hook and ladder men came up quickly.

"We've had something of a strain," said Wide. "I thought you could help these people down better."

The old man went down, supported by a fireman's arm.

Then the young wife was helped after him.

Wide and Terry both felt like collapsing after the strain, though they managed to get down the ladder unaided.

But now Reporter Peters was back on the scene, having run around.

He was telling the splendid, thrilling story to Chief Sharp and a group of listeners.

In another moment cheers for Wide and his comrades went up.

But our hero never even noticed the din of voices.

His mind was wholly on the fire.

Chief Pelton was on the spot, and so was Torrent.

Neptune No. 2 having reported "all-out" on that other fire, they had been summoned.

Now they came running up, with their machines, for the fire, so far, had been kept only from spreading much.

"Take a few moments to breathe, you four," ordered Chief Pelton, striding over to where the Washington heroes stood.

Fred Parsons, after seeing his hose coupled, and the line rushed forward by a hose crew, under Larry, came scowling over to where Young Wide Awake stood.

"You sneaked away from that other fire," raged Fred.

"I had to," Wide retorted. "This box called us."

"I don't mean that," lowered Fred. "I mean, you sneaked away from me. You insulted me and then ran away from me."

"I insulted you?"

"Yes, with your grinning face!"

"Parsons, if you think any one could help grinning at the way you bungled with that young woman on the ladder——"

"Stop that!" growled Fred, his face growing redder.

"Oh, go about your business!" growled Joe Darrell.

"Dick Halstead, you've got to fight me for that insult."

"Not now, though!" hinted Wide.

"By thunder, it ought to be now!"

Chief John Sharp came closer, just in time to hear.

"Parsons, get out of this!" ordered the little police chief. "Be ashamed of yourself, too, if there's manhood enough in you."

"I want satisfaction for an insult," glowered Fred.

"If Wide insulted you he had mighty good reason for it. Get out of here!"

"You forget, Mr. Sharp, that I have a right here," bluffed Captain Fred.

"You've no right trying to pick a fight with a fireman who is panting after one of the bravest rescues I ever heard of. Captain Halstead is in no condition to fight at this moment, even if he wanted to. He's got to get his wind back, and his strength back. Get out of here!"

"Let go of me, chief!" ordered Fred, sulkily, for Sharp had taken him by the shoulders.

"You get away from here!" grated Chief Sharp, giving the Neptune captain a shove. "If you don't attend strictly to your own business, I'll take the responsibility of running you outside the fire lines and keeping you outside."

"I'll demand satisfaction from you later, Halstead!" roared Fred, in a towering rage, as he felt himself shoved away.

"Oh, you'll get it!" retorted Young Wide Awake, with a dry grimace that made the spectators laugh.

Fred made a pretense of keeping busy at his duties after that, though, as he didn't bother Larry much, that lieutenant got along better without his captain's help than he could have done with it.

In twenty minutes more the three streams began to tell on the flames.

After that it was all down hill for the fire.

All-out sounded in time for the firemen to get home to a late dinner.

As the three companies were coiling up hose, Wide, though he still felt far from strong after that late awful strain, looked curiously about him for Captain Fred.

Parsons, however, appeared to be intensely busy superintending the work of the Neptune crew.

"He doesn't seem to be looking for you now, does he?" queried Joe, with a dark gleam in his snapping eyes.

"Oh, if Fred does want me, he knows where I'm to be found," laughed Wide, coolly. "He'll never have any difficulty finding me."

"Why don't you remind him that you're around?"

"Oh, we don't want rows all the time. Besides, when I'm in anything like shape I know that I can thump Parsons. So where's the sport of it? The fellow's so mean, Joe, that I really hate to put my hands on him, except in self-defense. I always feel, after hitting Fred Parsons, as though I had touched something unclean. I always want to wash my hands afterwards."

Joe roared out with laughter at that.

His laugh carried so far that Captain Fred heard, and, not doubting that he was being discussed, scowled blackly at the young officers of Washington No. 1.

Yet he didn't offer to come over, for Fred, for the time being, at least, had changed his mind about wanting satisfaction with the fist.

"Get under way, Neptune!" he bawled, as soon as he saw that things were ready.

"Twenty-three!" jeered some one in the crowd.

"Nothing doing," sighed Joe, disappointedly. "I was afraid of that."

In the meantime Reporter Peters had hurried back to his office, and now the "Evening Herald" was putting out a bulletin headed:

"Magnificent rescue by our young fire captain."

Bob and Fred exchanged glances as that line caught their eye as they passed the newspaper office.

CHAPTER XI.

ATTORNEY BRISTOW FORGETS TO BE SMOOTH.

Terry showed up at Wide's house early in the afternoon.

"What'll yez be doing the day, Wide?" he wanted to know.

"I didn't know but that it would be a fine idea to take things easy," smiled our hero.

"What? Be shtaying in th' house whin ye've the loan of an auto for only a day or two?"

"Do you think the girls would care to go out with us?"

"Av they don't want to, and have something else on their hands, thin we can easy take a r-ride be ourselves, or invite some av the fellers to go wid us."

But Kitty and Faith, leaving novels and hammocks when the big car turned into the yard, proved to be quite willing to take a spin.

Within fifteen minutes they were quite ready.

"Has your mother had any peace from people after money to-day?" asked Kitty, as they sped away from the Lester grounds.

"Oh, yes," Wide answered. "But she has to get it by staying behind a locked office door, and she can't attend to any business."

"She doesn't need any business now," laughed Kitty.

"I think she'd be happier, working in the old way."

"Have you heard any further word from the lawyers who are handling the estate?"

"Not a word. But they warned us that it would probably be a few days before they could come to us."

"That's odd," mused Kitty. "You wouldn't think that a law firm could have any more important business than giving first thought of all to such a big matter."

"I don't know anything about such things," smiled Wide. "I never before was even threatened with an inheritance."

Just in a spirit of mischief he turned the touring car into upper Holmes Street, gliding by the Neptune firehouse.

Captain Fred Parsons, hearing the car's approach, and thinking that it might be Anita coming to speak with him, came to the door.

He glared darkly at his rival—at the whole party, in fact.

"Fred doesn't seem to be as happy as he ought to be, considering that he is so much in the company of that charming Miss Duroc," observed Mistress Kitty.

"Fred couldn't be happy under any circumstances," retorted Wide. "Happiness comes from springs that are inside of one. If he hasn't the knack of being happy and making others happy, then I don't believe he can be happy, no matter what happens."

"Who's that man scowling at us so?" asked Kitty, when they had gotten a mile away and were going through the lower part of the city.

"Why, that's Mr. Bristow, of Bristow & Packer, lawyers," the young fire captain answered, after a glance at the portly, black-clothed gentleman on the sidewalk.

"He looked as if he didn't like you."

"Why, those two fellows checked themselves into my mother's office yesterday and fairly insisted on stepping in

between herself and the executors. Said they were necessary, but Terry and I invited them to step down into the street."

"Wouldn't your mother liked to have been out with us this afternoon?"

"Hardly. She doesn't dare go anywhere for fear some one will waylay her with an effort to sell property, or shove a dozen subscription papers in her face."

"There's some one we can take for a little spin," cried Kitty, suddenly. "Do stop!"

Flossie, looking her sweetest and prettiest in a lovely little dress given her the day before by Mistress Kitty, was out enjoying herself in such fine plumage.

She turned quickly at the call.

"There's a seat to spare in back," suggested Kitty. "Wouldn't you like to go a little way with us, Flossie?"

"Oh, that would be splendid. I've always wanted to have a ride in an automobile," cried Flossie, coming eagerly forward.

Terry jumped down to the sidewalk, helping her in in his most gallant manner.

One there was in sight who didn't appreciate this turn of affairs.

Bud Messner had espied Flossie the moment before.

As Skip wasn't with her, Bud bore down in her direction, intending to get either a stroll with the pretty miss, or else to give up only after the most severe kind of a snub.

"Oh, punk!" muttered Bud, as he saw Flossie being lifted into the car. "W'y can't dem rich guys give some of us a chanst once in a year?"

As the big car started away again Bud raised a small fist and shook it in their direction.

Flossie was highly delighted with the next hour of swift driving.

She was in the seventh heaven of delight and pride when Wide drove around into her own neighborhood, leaving her at her door, where all the neighbors could see her alight.

Flossie was most profuse in her thanks.

"One youngster has had a good time to-day, anyway," smiled Kitty.

It was after five o'clock when our hero left his pretty mother at the Lester home.

He and Terry next drove to the garage, where they put the big car up.

Mrs. Halstead managed to get home from her office after being tackled by only one real estate agent and two charity solicitors.

After locking the doors she prepared their simple little supper.

The good woman looked so tired that Wide offered to say but little during the meal.

After it was over, Mrs. Halstead turned to her son.

"Dick," she began, "I'm sick of the trouble this fortune has brought us."

"It does seem more like a nightmare than anything else," Wide agreed. "The trouble is, we seem to have so much coming to us that the news is like a barrel of molasses that draws all the hungry flies."

"And how these flies stick," groaned the good woman.

"Poor mother," was her son's answer.

"I don't mean to give it up, though," Mrs. Halstead went on, wearily.

"You'll have to put it away quickly and secretly, mother," laughed Wide, "or you'll have a worse time than ever."

"We'll arrange it quietly, then," decided Mrs. Halstead. "I can still understand how it's a nice thing to have plenty money."

"In other words, mother, you're satisfied with what you've always been able to earn, and with the prospect of the modest little fortune that I hope to be able to pile away some day myself."

"That's surely all we could want, Dick."

"Let's open the doors and go out into the yard," suggested the young fire captain. "If the human flies try to swarm about, I'll drive 'em away, even if I have to use violence."

So, in the cool of the evening, they passed out into the yard, Wide bringing out chairs.

For a wonder they weren't bothered, even the few neighbors who passed sending merely a pleasant "good evening," as formerly.

Just after dark, however, one figure did loom up at the gate that gave Wide a feeling of annoyance.

It was Mr. Bristow.

He wasn't smiling, either.

In fact, there was nothing in his manner that was like his smiling oiliness of the day before.

Cheekily enough he opened the gate and walked in, without asking permission.

"Say, would you mind closing the gate again?" asked Wide, coolly.

Mr. Bristow, halting, looked displeased.

"From the other side, I mean," Wide explained, as he rose. "I tried to make it plain to you yesterday, Mr. Bristow, that we didn't want to take up with your idea of business. I'm sorry if I have to be rude about it now, but I've got to make it plain that the less we see of you and your partner the better we shall be pleased."

"That will suit me admirably," retorted Bristow, gruffly. "But first of all, before closing with you, I have a little business that I would like to talk over."

"My mother's tired to-night," Wide returned. "She simply can't be bothered with business, or anything else that begins with a 'B.'"

"I don't need to bother your mother about this business. In fact, I didn't intend to," responded Mr. Bristow. "You and I can handle the matter quite alone."

"Oh, that's all right, then," Wide retorted, more good-naturedly. "We can walk away a bit from this place, though, can't we?"

"Yes," nodded the caller, stiffly.

Wide, after a glance at his mother, opened the gate again, standing back for Bristow to pass out ahead of him.

The two walked down the street in the darkness, neither speaking for awhile.

"Well," demanded the young fire captain, finally, "how much further do you propose taking me?"

"A little further, if you don't mind."

They came to a halt opposite an open field.

"Now, what's the business?" inquired Wide, briskly.

"You have an automobile at a garage in this city," began Lawyer Bristow.

"Yes; but it isn't mine."

"I know it," said Bristow, curtly. "It's mine."

"Yours?" gasped Wide, looking hard into the man's eyes.

"That is to say, it belongs to Packer and myself, and it represents a good part of all the property we own in the world."

"Thunder!" burst from Wide's lips. "Then how did those rascals who nabbed me get hold of it?"

"I'm not prepared to go into any details," returned Bristow, with a slight shrug. "All I have to say is that we want that car back, and at once."

"Nothing easier," our hero answered. "We'll go before Chief Sharp. You prove your property, good and clear, and I'll go to the garage with you and tell Weber to turn the car over to you."

"No," responded the lawyer, "that won't do."

"Why not?" Captain Halstead challenged him.

"I'll tell you what you must do, Halstead. You must walk up to the garage with me now, take the car out, drive me out into the country, as I direct, and there leave me in the car. You'll never be bothered with it again."

But there came a sudden ugly gleam in Young Wide Awake's opening eyes.

"Bristow, you scoundrel," he trembled, clenching his fists, while a stern look rested on his white face, "you and your infernal partner were the wretches who set that gang on to try to kidnap me."

"We won't discuss that," proposed Bristow, with a wave of his hand.

"Yes, we will!"

"I say no."

"And I say yes!"

"Humph, you young fool! Do you think you're going to make me admit anything like that?"

"I don't care a hang whether you admit it or not!" raged Wide, his voice husky and shaking. "But the men who tried to kidnap me handled roughly the young lady I was with at the time. You were behind those scoundrels—and I'm going to beat your oily carcass to a pulp!"

Bristow sprang back, but Wide did not heed that.

He knew he could get his man at a bound, and he had one more word to say yet.

"Bristow, you——"

Yet Wide stopped, and even in his rage he knew he was checkmated.

For Bristow was pointing a cocked revolver at his waistline, and the hand that held the weapon aimed was as steady as a band of steel!

"I won't take that beating," retorted Bristow. "But I will take my car, without delay."

"You can't get it," hissed Young Wide Awake, "without my order."

"But you will go with me and give the order. I shall have this pistol in my pocket, where I can pump it into your side at any sign of mutiny. You won't know an instant of safety until you leave me and my car on a country road."

"Don't think you'll win out that way," sneered the young fire captain.

"We'll go to the garage now, young man!"

"I won't stir from here—with you."

"Then I shall kill you where you stand, and at once!" warned the portly man, in a tone that meant cold, deadly business.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

There didn't seem to be any other way out of it.

Young Wide Awake didn't care to die for nothing, or next to it.

As for Lawyer Bristow, our hero realized that that portly gentleman, despite his fatness, and despite his usual oiliness, could be as resolute as a general, and as unyielding as death itself.

In the darkness our hero saw figures gliding up behind the lawyer.

They were prowling figures, quite undoubtedly those of some of Bristow's wretches.

Then there came a sudden rush, and a head shot unexpectedly between the legs of the portly man.

Then, heavy as Bristow was, that intruding head shot upward, and the owner of that head rose, with the astounded portly one on his shoulders.

It was all done like a flash, while the two other prowling figures suddenly gripped at Bristow's arms—and the revolver was snatched away without a shot being fired.

"Dump him, Jim!" advised one of the weapon-snatchers.

Thud! It was a hard fall that Bristow got to the sidewalk.

Then, to make matters worse—for the portly one—Jim sat upon his stomach.

"Don't try to get up," counselled the upper dog, coolly.

Wide had bounded back, and that was all. He felt almost rooted to the spot with astonishment at this swift, dramatic interruption.

"You must be young Dick Halstead?" spoke Jim, looking up from the fallen one.

"That's my name," Wide admitted.

"Glad we found you, then, just as we did. But I am forgetting all the laws of courtesy. I am Jim Carson, reporter for the 'Star.' That languid-looking gentleman who is examining the cutlery he just removed from Bristow's hand, is Tom Tupper, of the 'Avalanche.' The other fellow, who doesn't count for anything, anyway, is Hig Baker, of the 'Times.'"

"Thanks," drawled Hig.

"We just stopped at your house," went on Jim, genially. "A lady there, your mother, I presume, told us you had strolled down this way with a lawyer named Bristow. Now, we happen to know a few things about Bristow and Packer—eh, fellows?"

"We do," confirmed the others.

"I'm sorry that you must be a listener to what is hardly praise of yourself," went on Jim Carson, looking down and giving the portly one a poke in his ribs. "but the truth is, Captain Halstead, Bristow and Packer, while they're really lawyers, are about as rascally a pair as ever kept out of prison. We've encountered their smooth games before—eh, fellows?"

"That's right," nodded Tupper and Baker.

"The only trouble has been," pursued Jim, easily, "is that we never before got this brace where we could really prove anything against them. But now I guess we can, or we can help you to, for we took this direction, after speaking with your mother. Our canvas shoes with rubber soles generally spoken of as sneakers, enabled us to come up softly enough to jump this fat old rat."

Carson gave Bristow another poke in the ribs by way of emphasis.

"Whenever you'll be good enough to get up off my tired body I shall be glad to go my way and leave you four to talk among yourselves," proposed Lawyer Bristow, coolly.

"Oh, you will, will you?" asked Jim. "Sorry that we can't oblige you, but the truth is, I'm afraid we fellows want to see you behind bars, and your partner with you. In fact, I've a notion that we're going to make sure of the game, for we're always inconsiderate, you know, when we scent a good, lively bit of news."

"Have you young men any idea what legal troubles you will get yourselves into, if you persist in your intention of placing me under arrest?" insinuated Bristow, in a tone that was meant to be a warning of trouble.

"No; and I can't say that we care much," replied Jim, as he drew out a cigarette and lighted it. "You see, Bristow, all the great daily papers hire good lawyers to look after the legal end of their business. So, whether you relish it or not, you're going behind bars now, and we'll talk about the consequences after we get the news in. Get up, if you want to."

Jim rose, but Bristow didn't.

"Raise him, boys," advised Carson.

The portly one was dragged to his feet, while Wide stood next, with lively appreciation, at the trim, powerful, athletic figure of Carson himself.

"You seem to be pretty husky for a man whose hardest work is pushing a pencil," suggested the young fire captain.

"Oh," Jim responded, carelessly, "I was left tackle for my college team, you see, and I've never gotten quite out of training. A reporter often needs muscle more than he needs brains."

While Turner held on to the lawyer, Baker ran his hands down over that crestfallen gentleman's clothing, to make sure that he had no more weapons about him.

"Now if you'll show us where to take this gentleman, so that he'll be sure to keep well——" suggested Tom Turner.

"The start of the route is right up this street," Wide nodded.

"Then see here, you fellows," proposed Carson, "you keep Bristow a bit. I want to go on ahead with Halstead and put him wise to a few things."

Our hero wondered what could be coming, but Carson didn't keep him waiting many seconds.

"Halstead," began Jim, "I know it's going to be a tremendous disappointment to you, but that yarn about the big fortune is all the baldest kind of a bad fake."

"What's that?" almost shouted the young fire captain.

"Repeat it again, will you?"

Jim complied, adding:

"Don't take it too hard, old chap."

"I shan't, even if you can prove what you say," Wide assured him. "But how did the fake start?"

"Do you happen to know a fellow in this city named Bob Fullerton?"

"Of course."

"Well, he launched the job."

"Bob Fullerton?" exclaimed Wide. "I didn't think he had the brains. My hat is off to him—and my coat, too," Wide added, grimly, as he remembered again the rough handling that had come to Kitty through the trick.

Then, suddenly, our hero demanded:

"Did you tell my mother this?"

"No," Jim answered. "It seemed a shame for strangers to spring such a shock on her. We thought we'd better wait and let you do it yourself."

"Shock?" retorted Young Halstead. "Hm! If you catch my mother fainting over the news, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Jim Carson, rather curtly.

"Why, the fact is, mother and I have been so contented, getting along in our own way that we didn't altogether relish having swarms of people bothering us for our money. Did you ever have the experience?"

"No," Jim admitted, sadly, "I never did."

"But how on earth did Fullerton ever rig up such a scheme as this?"

"Oh, it was easy enough, after it was once thought out," replied Carson. "He has a friend in our city, named Allen Thurber. Thurber's folks, and the whole household, are away, and young Thurber was stopping at home as a sort of unpaid caretaker. Fullerton, it seems, knew that."

"Well, Fullerton rushed off up to our city and got the ad put in the paper, giving Thurber's address. Thurber quickly got some lawyers' letter-heads printed, with the name of Johnson & Benedict on them, and still giving the Thurber address. There are no such lawyers in our city."

"Fullerton left young Thurber copies of the telegram and the letter that were sent you, so Thurber knew just what to do when he heard from you."

"Well, Halstead, of course a yarn like this one makes a big stir in newspaper offices. We printed it, at first, just as we got hold of it. Then reporters were chased out to find Messrs. Johnson & Benedict. Of course we couldn't find them. It wasn't until this afternoon that we succeeded in landing young Thurber. Then, by frightening him into the idea that he had done something that might land him in jail, we got the whole yarn out of him as far as he knew it. That's all. The rest we've got to learn from you—and Fullerton."

Wide had led them through a back street to the police station.

Chief Sharp was not there, but the officer on deck promptly locked up Lawyer Bristow on a charge of threats to kill.

Then Wide and the reporters hurried to the Halstead house.

There Mrs. Halstead was quickly made aware of the real state of matters.

Her calm, her lack of disappointment, filled the reporters with wonder.

But it made a wonderfully good news "story."

Then the reporters hurried after Fullerton.

They invited our hero to go along with them.

"No," Wide answered. "I shall see Fullerton at my own time and in my own way."

Of course, the newest phase of the sensation got around the town without much loss of time.

Then the "Evening Herald" came out with a bulletin headed:

"Halstead millions all bosh!

"Young fire captain victim of practical joke."

Terry Rourke, however, got around in time to hear the news at first hand.

"'Tis too bad, Wide," he muttered. "But though ye've been sold, it's been worth a lot to yure friends. They've found that millions couldn't make anny difference in yure treatment av thim. It may be worth a lot to yez, wan av these days, to have your friends sure av thot much."

Ted got the news on Main Street. He 'phoned it home without the loss of a second.

Kitty called our hero up on the wire.

"I've just heard the news," she said. "Is Terry there?"

"Yes."

"Then, why don't you come up with him? And your mother? Wouldn't she find it a change to come up here and get away from her home, after all the excitement she has had?"

So all three journeyed uptown on a car.

Those of the Lester household, however, quickly found that they were not called upon to offer sympathy.

"Is Dick really cool about it, or is he bearing up well?" Faith whispered when she had withdrawn to a lawn seat with Rourke.

"Wide feels jist as bad as he seems to," returned Terry. "Take thot straight from me, Faith, darlint."

"It all seems such a strange tangle and hubbub, Dick," Kitty murmured, when they were alone. "But it has been worth more to me, dear, than you can understand. It has revealed you to me in the way I have always liked to think of you."

"Of course I ought to say something back for that," laughed Wide. "But I'm not going to. Can't think of anything suitable just now. I pass."

"But really, I'm serious about it, Dick, dear," insisted Mistress Kitty, with pretty earnestness. "Somehow it seems to me that I'm more pleased than if you had gotten the money. But I wonder how Bob Fullerton feels to-night?"

"I know how he's going to feel," spoke Wide, ominously.

"You're not going to thrash him for the trick, are you?"

"Not for the trick, directly, but on account of the rough way the trick resulted in your being handled, Kit, girl."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, dear. Somehow I feel just like calling the whole thing quits."

"I do, except on that one point, and also on the matter of my mother's terrible annoyance for two days," said Wide, with a snap of his jaws.

Then, seeing how he felt about the need of chastising Fullerton, Mistress Kitty was silent, just as her fireman sweetheart had been on the subject of her declining Anita's invitation.

Young Wide Awake found himself with a big automobile on his hands that no one offered a good claim to.

In the end, after taking legal advice, he sold the car for eight hundred dollars.

This money he divided evenly with Terry Rourke, though it took almost a fight to make the young Irishman accept his share.

"Shure, what did Oi do t' get me share?" Terry wanted to know.

"You stopped the kidnapping in time. If you hadn't done that, I'd have gotten something else, maybe much different from an auto that I couldn't afford to keep."

So, in the end, Terry had his share forced upon him.

Both young firemen put it away in bank, against the time when they might need it in their further education.

Bob Fullerton got roundly scored in the newspaper accounts, and held up to so much ridicule that he dreaded to walk the streets of Belmont.

Of course, everybody suspected that Fred Parsons and his cronies had been mixed up in Bob's latest, and they came in for their share of the general contempt.

Young Allen Thurber escaped with some unpleasant notoriety, coupled with the scare that the reporters had given him in extorting his confession.

But to return, for an instant, to Young Wide Awake and his sweetheart:

Kitty sat musing for some time, her elbow resting on one knee, and her chin in her hand.

Wide sat more erect, glancing down at the soft, white, delicately veined neck.

From there he glanced down at the firm, rounded white forearm, up to the elbow, where a little mass of perfumed lace overtook it.

He glanced at the soft, brown hair that formed a crown to the well-shaped head.

Then he sighed.

"What's the matter?" asked Mistress Kitty, without looking up.

"I was just thinking," Wide answered, rather dreamily, "that kings haven't got anything for which I envy them."

THE END.

Next week our readers will be wonderfully well entertained by more of the rousing adventures of the Belmont boys. "YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S JUNIOR FIREMEN; OR, SKIP AND TED AT THEIR BEST," will be published complete in No. 66 of "The Wide Awake Weekly." We promise you there won't be a dull line in this great story that is coming. It will abound in fun, frolic, adventure and romance. It's as good a story as Mr. Robert Lennox ever wrote—and that's saying a great deal. Next week! Look out for No. 66!

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

As Greater New York now stands, a contemporary states that less than one-half of 1 per cent. of the water of the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx is supplied by a private company; the rest by the city. Ninety-three per cent. of Brooklyn is supplied by the city, the remainder by private companies. Queens is supplied largely by wells, 30 per cent. owned by the city, and 70 per cent. by individuals and private corporations. Richmond still depends upon wells, either private or owned by private corporations.

The city of Paris owes its origin to the conquest of Gaul by Cæsar. When this Roman general on his path of conquest came to the present site of the French capitol, he found a swampy island in the river Seine, which was inhabited by a Gallic tribe called Parisii, who lived in huts made of rushes. Rather than be captured by the Romans, these people burned their rude city, which they called Lutetia, or "mud town," and the great Cæsar, quick to appreciate the situation, built a temple to Jupiter and a wall round the island. A town soon sprang up about the temple, and was named Parisii, after the ancient tribe. In later years this was shortened to Paris.

The people of Iceland are so honest that there are neither prisons nor police in the country. It is said that there have been only two thefts in one thousand years.

One of these was that of a native who was detected stealing sheep; but as he had done so to supply his family, who were suffering for want of food, he was not punished, the shame attached to his condition being deemed sufficient degradation.

The other was by a German who stole seventeen sheep, and as he was in comfortable circumstances he was sentenced to sell all of his property, restore the value of what he had stolen, and leave the country, or be executed. He left.

There are courts of justice; but it is not an inviting field of operations for lawyers.

In the ancient church of Minster in Kent, England, is an old wooden box, of which the rounded lid is made of a portion of a tree hollowed out. This old box is believed to have been brought to England by William the Conqueror, who kept in it the money with which he paid his troops.

The box being made from the trunk of a tree, suggested to the commercial mind the name trunk, by which we now speak of boxes used by latter day people in their travels.

Scholars have already wondered why it was that the ancient Roman genius never achieved the art of printing. The secret of the failure lies probably in the fact that the Roman never discovered how to make paper, for recent investigations prove that they had in use wooden and metal stamps for marking wares, packages, etc.

The phrase "Hobson's choice" originated in an English livery stable. Tobias Hobson was the first man in England to rent out hackney horses. It may have been through an unshakable sense of justice, it may have been through laziness, but at all events this eccentric stable keeper obliged all who applied to him to rent a horse to take the one which happened to be standing nearest the stable door. And so the phrase "Hobson's choice" came to mean no choice at all.

The term morganatic as applied to marriages found its origin in an ancient custom. In olden times the bridegroom on the day after his marriages gave his bride a morning gift (*morganabe*). In the case of a nobleman who wedded a wife beneath his station, this gift constituted the wife's portion, or endowment. It was from this gift that the name morganatic came to be applied to marriages.

The battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, was the only important engagement in naval warfare in which one fleet was swept out of existence, utterly annihilated, without the loss of a single man to the victors. Commodore Dewey had a few men slightly wounded, while the Spaniards lost fully 350 killed, and about 700 wounded. Admiral Montojo commanded the Spanish squadron. The Americans destroyed eleven vessels, captured several others, and also captured all the land batteries.

It is suggested in London that all children should have name and address written in the lining of their hats or caps.

More than 5,000 bicycles were recently purchased in a fortnight in Johannesburg because of a breakdown in the electric street railway system.

RIB TICKLERS.

She—Perhaps if you knew what the bill was for you wouldn't make so much fuss about paying it.

He—Well, what is it for?

She—It's for the Christmas present I gave you.

"These fellows were fighting," said the policeman.

"You Honor," began one of the prisoners, "I beg of you not to accept so crude a misconstruction of our acts. Doubtless you have heard of a 'gentleman's agreement?'"

"Certainly."

"Well, we had one, but it had progressed to the stage where it became a 'gentleman's disagreement.'"

Yet was the judge deaf to reason.

"Speak of me," quoth the novelist, magnanimously, "as frankly as if I had been dead a hundred years." "If you had been dead a hundred years I shouldn't be speaking of you at all," replied the critic, taking prompt advantage of the dispensation.

Nora—you see, you were quite mistaken in saying that Dr. Birkenstock didn't care a rap about me! He told me himself he did yesterday, and declared he could eat me.

Lola—I congratulate you. Your sweetheart's favorite dish is evidently goose.

"Your boy," said the professor, "has a fine head——"

"He gits that from me," interrupted the old man.

"For learning," finished the professor.

"He gits that from me, John," spoke up the old lady. "I was in the Third Reader when you married me."

"It broadens one's horizon, so to speak, does it not?" inquired the man who was studying municipal conditions; "to serve the city in the capacity of Alderman?"

"I don't know about that," answered the other man, "but I've noticed that it generally broadens his equator."

A Mysterious Heritage

By Kit Clyde.

"Well, that is enough to make any man blue!" cried Percy Earle in a tone of disappointment and disgust, as he flung a letter he had been reading down upon the floor. "So that is the way my uncle proposes to use me after all that I have done for him when he was in life. Pshaw, it is an ungrateful world, anyway."

"What is wrong now, Percy, old boy? You ought not to have come under your uncle's displeasure, for he always seemed to like you."

"'Whom the gods love they torture,'" quoted Percy, picking up the crumpled letter again. "But just read that letter, Bob Reed, and tell me how in the name of goodness my uncle could have snubbed me so."

The scene was a pretty one. In his finely furnished bachelor apartments in New York, Percy Earle, student of the Bellevue college of medicine, stood by the glowing grate, with a moody disappointed expression upon his handsome face.

His companion was an older man and plainer dressed. He was a returned Australian fairly wealthy, and who lived consequently at his ease.

The postman had just left a letter at the door and its contents had upset Percy's nervous equilibrium. As he handed the note to Reed, the latter took it and read aloud:

"Westchester, May 10th, 18—.

"Mr. Percy Earle:

"Dear Sir:—By the terms of your uncle Gilbert Chester's will, which has just been found, it is learned that you are mistaken in the promise that you were his absolute heir. A cousin, Mr. Chester Norton, is bequeathed Chester Hall and its estates. But there is a clause in the will whereby you are bequeathed five acres of meadow land and a stone barn in East Chester, for which you will please present your claim. I have the honor to be, my dear sir,

"Yours with respect,

JOHN M. DEAN,

"Barrister and Notary."

Reed's face changed a trifle in expression as he read the note, and he exclaimed:

"Well, you are not entirely cut off, Percy."

"Entirely cut off," growled Percy. "Well, that is a fine comment. Pardon me, Reed, but I think you are obtuse. Don't you know that I was by rights my Uncle Gilbert's absolute heir?"

"By what rights?"

"Relationship, for one. I am his nephew, am I not?"

"But so is this Chester Norton."

"Confound him! He is a rascal of the deepest dye. Why, Uncle Gilbert turned him out of doors, and now he turns around and wills him the entire property."

"Not entire."

"Why not? He leaves me an old barn and five acres of land. I tell you it is an insult. I will contest that will."

Percy strode up and down the room in a state of great excitement. The loss of his uncle's fortune was no light matter to him. He had been reared in affluence, through his uncle's guardianship, and now at the age of life when it would be hard to break off these habits and submit to the penniless state, he was actually cut off with a shilling.

He knew Chester Norton had been always cordially hated by his uncle. All these things brought a suspicion into Percy's mind that there had been sharp practice and the will was forged. So strong was this belief that he was in earnest in his declaration that he would fight the will.

Gilbert Chester had been in life a very eccentric, singular sort of a man. He had lived the last ten years of his life, a perfect misanthrope, at Chester Hall, one of the finest places in the State of New York. Troubled as he was with gout and a hundred kindred ills, he was by no means an amiable personage to get along with.

At least, so thought Chester Norton, the old man's fashionable nephew, who deserted him in an hour of sickness, for which Uncle Gilbert had not forgiven him. At this juncture, Percy Earle had been called upon and served the old man with kindness and respect.

This had led Gilbert Chester to declare Percy his heir, and it was generally believed that he would inherit the estate. Now, however, after the old misanthrope had been dead six months, the will turns up and bequeaths the Hall and its lands to Chester Norton.

The reader can imagine Percy Earle's keen disappointment, for he had lived in anticipation of the wealth. Norton was his natural enemy and a dissolute fellow, which, of course, galled young Earle all the more.

If the will had cut him off with nothing, Percy would not have thought so much of the matter. But that he should be bequeathed the old stone barn and meadow clearly convinced him that his uncle had been of unsound mind.

However, he gradually cooled down, and after some serious reflection repented of a few rash resolves he had made. His friend Reed exerted a sensible influence over him.

"It cannot be helped now, Percy, old boy," he exclaimed. "The money will never do Norton any good. He will soon run through with it. Never mind, you have good friends and two strong arms, and can easily make your way in the world."

"I suppose I am a fool," admitted Percy. "Of course I could not disprove Norton's claim. Yet—I shall always believe my uncle insane."

"It may be that he was. However, you do not know the worth of this barn and meadow. It may amount to a good sum."

"Scarcely equal to the Hall," exclaimed Percy. "Humph? my uncle need not have troubled himself to remember me at all."

"Tut, tut!" cried Reed. "Don't be foolish, Percy. Well, I must leave you now, but I shall see you again very soon. I will go with you some day and we will pay a visit to your heritage."

With a laugh, Reed left the room. When the door had closed behind him, Percy thrust his hands into his pockets and walked ruefully up and down the floor.

Suddenly there came a rap on the door.

* * * * *

Let us go back to the moment when Gilbert Chester lay upon his death bed. Everything that money could pay for had been done to prolong the old millionaire's life. But in the order of nature, he was doomed to die.

By his bedside was a dark-visaged Southern type of man. Pierre Duganne was his name, and he had been Gilbert Chester's valet and private attendant for years.

While Duganne had appeared devoted to his master, and faithful in his duties, he had been a viper in the bosom. He was a warm friend of Chester Norton's, and the two had formulated a dark and villainous plot.

When it became plain to Duganne that his master was stricken with the last sickness, he had played a treacherous part. Calling him to his bedside in a sane moment, the old millionaire had said:

"Pierre, my good man, send at once for my dear boy, Percy. I must see him before I die."

"Shall I send for Chester Norton also?" asked the cunning valet.

"No!" declared the dying man, forcibly.

All this while Chester Norton, who had in the first place been summoned by Duganne, had been waiting in an outer room. It was an easy matter for Norton to disguise himself as Earle, and imitating his voice, come to the man's bedside.

His vision being dimmed by the film of death, Gilbert Chester could not penetrate the deception. He feebly grasped the deceiver's hand and gasped:

"Percy!—my boy—the money—is all yours. I—give it—to you——"

These were his last words. All the while Percy Earle had been in New York and was not summoned until after Gilbert Chester had breathed his last.

It was supposed that the will which the millionaire had

made was deposited in the Manhattan safety vaults in New York. But when these were opened it was not found there among his papers. For a long time the missing will was the exciting theme of discussion in business and social circles.

Had the truth been known that it was all the while in Duganne's possession, things would have assumed a different aspect. The rascally valet had seen his master hide it in a chest in the garret. Just as soon as death had claimed its victim, he went for the will, and locked in the library with Chester Norton it was read.

It was Norton's scheme to substitute a forged will in its place. But a strange light came over his face as he read it:

"To my nephew, Chester Norton, I do hereby bequeath Chester Hall and its lands, although I know that he is not fairly entitled to such consideration. It is in fulfillment of a promise given his mother upon her dying bed that I do this, for I would rather the old estate should be perpetuated in the name of Earle. With this bequest I accord him my dying contempt and dislike, but shall die happy in the knowledge that the property will never yield him any benefit."

With a derisive laugh Chester Norton threw the document upon the table. But there was a serious light in Duganne's eyes as he picked it up.

"There is one sentence here I do not understand, Master Chester," he said. "Pardon me, but did you read the last words of that clause carefully?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Norton with a start. "What do you mean?"

"Here they are: but shall die happy in the knowledge that the property will never yield him any benefit."

"Eh?"

Norton studied the sentence a moment, and then said, hoarsely:

"Confound him! He was a queer old chap. I take it, though, that he wishes to insinuate that I will run through with the money quickly. We shall see about that."

The valet folded the document and laid it again upon the table.

"Then we will need to make no change in the paper?" he

"No," replied Norton decisively. "It is not necessary, which clears us of quite a slippery task. Now, Pierre, we will proceed to business right after the funeral. Take the will back to the garret. Let it be found there. Let me see! Are any of Percy Earle's traps here?"

"He has a suite in the west wing," replied the valet.

"He has, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I'll give him a good cut. This is my opportunity. Next week after the will is read I will go down and call on him, and request him politely to take his baggage away. Won't it be a grind on him?"

Chuckling to himself over the prospective plan for revenge upon his hated rival, Chester Norton left the room.

Then it occurred to him to call upon Percy Earle. He it was who gave the rap on the door which disturbed Percy in his soliloquy after he had been left alone by his friend Reed.

Percy opened the door and started violently at sight of Chester Norton, who walked unbidden into the room. The two enemies looked at each other.

"Well, you don't seem to be very glad to see me?" asked Norton, with a sneering smile. "But then you never did have much love for me anyway. Can't you congratulate me upon my luck? You know I am now master of Chester Hall."

"I had heard of the terms of my uncle's will," replied Percy, coolly.

"Ah, fine old gentleman, wasn't he? But I see he didn't quite forget you."

Hot words were at the end of Percy's tongue, but he restrained himself.

"I do not wish to criticise my uncle's dying requests," he calmly said. "Although I can hardly believe that he was in his right mind."

This angered Norton.

"Oh, you think, doubtless, that he had ought to have left it to you. You were so goody good, and played the hypocrite."

"Hold!" cried Percy Earle, in a voice of thunder. "Do not

offer me insult in my own apartments. I am in no mood to stand personal abuse of any sort, Chester Norton."

The villain could not help but quail beneath his cousin's righteous indignation. But he had not as yet sufficiently vented his spleen, and as a finale, exclaimed:

"It was not the object of my visit to have any words with you at all, Percy Earle. You may be glad to beg at my feet one of these days. But I wish to notify you that some of your traps are at my house, and I warn you to take them away, or I shall order my valet to burn them. That is all."

The door slammed behind him, and Percy Earle, with throbbing temples, was left alone. He threw himself upon a sofa.

"What can I do?" he cried, abjectly. "I shall soon be out of money, and that means out of friends. Yet I believe Bob Reed will stick by me."

It was two days later when Bob Reed entered the bachelor apartments of his friend Earle, and found him at work hard. After a few pleasant words, Reed said:

"Why not take a trip out to the stone barn to-day, Percy? You want to see your mysterious heritage. We can take our guns along, and have a little hunt at the same time."

"I am with you," cried Percy, springing up. "It is a good day to go."

They procured tickets for Westchester and there engaged a stable team. Driving out into the country a ways, they came at length to the meadow and the stone barn, a most picturesque and lovely situation.

"I tell you, Percy, this ain't so bad after all," cried Reed, enthusiastically, as they tied the horse and walked up to the barn. "When you get rich you can build a fine residence here."

The barn door was locked, but they saw a large double gate with diamond-shaped apertures, and a sight beyond caused Percy a wild cry of surprise.

"My soul, Reed," he gasped, "just look at that!"

Plainly both saw two men with spades in their hands digging a hole in the ground. They started up as they heard Percy's voice. They were no others than Chester Norton and his faithful valet, Duganne.

There was an expression of terror upon Norton's face.

"Hurry up, Pierre!" he cried excitedly. "We must get it out before anybody comes."

But Percy Earle burst the gates open and stood before his enemy. The effect was dramatic.

"The game is up," howled Norton, dropping his spade and falling back, "curse the luck."

"Yes," cried Percy, in a ringing voice. "The game is up, Chester Norton. What are you doing upon my land. You were quick to order my effects from the Hall. I now warn you to get off from my land instantly or I will kick you off."

While he was speaking and while the two discomfited villains were retreating, Reed, who had guessed the truth, had picked up one of the spades and unearthed a large iron-bound box, recently buried in the yard.

A blow of the spade shivered the cover and both men reeled back aghast as the contents of the chest were spread before them in bank bills and gold coin.

"My uncle's money," gasped Percy.

A note lay with the money and Reed hurriedly read it.

"Thus do I remember my dear Percy. The heritage of the stone barn is his, and may it bring him happiness is the last request of his uncle,

GILBERT CHESTER."

Truly, of all the eccentric freaks of the misanthrope's life this was the most singular.

Need we say more? Of course Percy built his home upon the site of the mysterious heritage, and was happy in its possession. With a loving wife and children he lives there to-day.

Chester Hall, which after all was a tumble-down old estate, was foreclosed upon, and Chester Norton was left penniless, his dreams of licentious life having crumbled. I will let the reader decide as to whether the misanthrope, Gilbert Chester, acted wisely or not, in this singular disposition of his rich estate.

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